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**BRITISH AND FRENCH SERVICEMEN IN THE MALAYAN EMERGENCY AND THE INDOCHINA WAR, 1945-1960  
EXPERIENCE AND MEMORY**

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BRITISH AND FRENCH SERVICEMEN IN THE  
MALAYAN EMERGENCY AND THE INDOCHINA  
WAR, 1945-1960: EXPERIENCE AND MEMORY

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of History  
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## Abstract

Between 1945 and 1960 the British and French governments sent thousands of regular and conscript soldiers to Malaya and Indochina. There, assisted by locally-raised troops and units from other parts of the British Commonwealth and the French Union (or the former empires respectively), they attempted to suppress communist-inspired insurgencies.

This thesis examines responses of British and French army personnel, both male and female, to these conflicts, the territories and local communities. It begins with an analysis of the forces' composition and the international context they operated in. It then asks whether soldiers labelled the conflicts as local disturbances, wars of decolonisation or Cold War theatres. In parallel, it inquires if they saw their enemies as bandits, nationalists or communist agents. The last two chapters investigate military views on centres of population, infrastructure, environment and peoples, or rather, the extent to which they occupied soldierly minds. Behind this scrutiny lies an attempt to identify imperial affinities, pre-conceived colonial images and pronouncements on Britain's and France's imperial records.

In scrutinising these issues the thesis seeks to verify the often-cited, but insufficiently supported, claim that Britain's and France's armed forces were strongly linked and attached to the colonial empires through conquest, policing and defence. More specifically, the project seeks to fill a gap in the existing literature in regard to military reactions to the end of empires. It does so through a comparative and interdisciplinary approach, drawing from and feeding into imperial, military, political, social, European and Southeast Asian history.

The project has relied to a large extent on oral sources. Careful consideration has therefore been given to the ways, in which events have been remembered, how this memory has been shaped over the decades and how it compares to academic studies.

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## Timetable of the Malayan Emergency

1928	South Seas Communist Party, later named Malayan Communist Party (MCP), is founded in Singapore.
Feb. 1942	Singapore's garrison surrenders to the Japanese after the latter have swept the British-controlled peninsula in barely three months.
1943	Britain's Special Operations Executive (SOE) sends the newly launched Force 136 into occupied Malaya to contact and cooperate with the Chinese-dominated Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA). The force subsequently provides the latter with training, arms and other equipment.
August 1945	The Japanese surrender after nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The end of hostilities forestalls a British invasion of Malaya (Operation Zipper).
Sept. 1945	British troops enter Malaya. The MPAJA agrees to disband and hand over its weapons but stores considerable quantities of the latter in jungle dumps.
Sept. 1945- March 1946	The British Military Administration (BMA) attempts to rebuild the Malayan infrastructure, alleviate hunger and reintroduce administration but succeeds only partially.
1946	<p>The British government introduces the Malayan Union, aimed at centralising the administration, reducing the role of sultans, offering full citizenship to more Chinese and Indians while preparing Malaya for eventual self-government.</p> <p>Malays shun the initiation of the Union. Dato Onn bin Jaafar founds the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO).</p> <p>Communists systematically infiltrate unions and schools while sparking strikes.</p>
March 1947	Chin Peng assumes leadership of the MCP after his predecessor and suspected double agent, Lai Teck, disappears.
Feb. 1948	<p>The British government yields to strong pressure from Malays and British ex-civil servants and abandons the Malayan Union. It opts for a federation instead, which comprises nine Malay states and two British settlements (Penang and Malacca).</p> <p>Malays enter the executive and legislative councils.</p>
March 1948	After a communist conference in Calcutta armed uprisings in India and Burma erupt. Indonesia and the Philippines are to follow.

June 1948	<p>The MCP calls up veterans of the MPAJA. Re-formed units and individuals begin to destroy communications, slash rubber trees and attack plantation managers.</p> <p>After the killing of three European planters High-Commissioner Gent declares a state of emergency. Mandatory registrations of the population, round-ups, destruction of housing, detention without trial and deportations of (suspected) communists and supporters ensue.</p>
Dec. 1948	Scots Guards shoot 24 Chinese villagers under controversial circumstances.
Feb. 1949	Tan Cheng Lock founds the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) as a counterweight to the MCP.
April 1949	The MPAJA temporarily withdraws into the jungle to reorganise. It changes its name to Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA).
April 1950	Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Briggs is appointed director of operations. He initiates a comprehensive counter-insurgency programme involving resettlements, food control, expansion of Special Branch as well as coordinating bodies composed of civilian and military personnel on district, state and federal level.
Oct. 1951	<p>High Commissioner Sir Henry Gurney is assassinated near Fraser's Hill.</p> <p>The MCP issues new directives ('October resolutions') to replace indiscriminate violence with selective terror and subversion. Larger units are to be split up and cultivations in the jungle to be developed.</p> <p>By then the number of active rebel fighters is officially estimated at roughly 7,000. They are aided by several hundred thousand Chinese civilians, mostly squatters.</p>
Feb. 1952	<p>General Sir Gerald Templer assumes the roles of high-commissioner and director of operations.</p> <p>Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttelton promises independence for Malaya provided 'racial harmony' (i.e. agreement between the main ethnicity-based parties) takes hold.</p> <p>Elections for city, town and village councils are held. The newly formed alliance between the UMNO, now under Tunku Abdul Rahman, and the MCA win a majority in Kuala Lumpur.</p>
1953	The first 'white' (i.e. pacified) area is declared, restrictions are lifted and development works begun.



	The arrival of helicopters prompts the establishment of first jungle forts in aboriginal areas.
June 1954	Templer hands over responsibilities to Sir Donald MacGillivray and Lieutenant-General Sir Geoffrey Kemp-Bourne. Under his reign attacks on civilians, security forces and infrastructure have been reduced by 20% from their peak in 1951. At the same time the MNLA has lost two-thirds of its strength. Before Templer's departure he announces federal elections.
July 1955	The UMNO-MCA alliance, now joined by the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), wins 51 of 52 possible seats in the legislative council and a majority in the executive council. Rahman becomes chief minister and chairman of the Emergency Operations Council.
Dec. 1955	Truce talks between 'the Tunku' and Chin Peng fail as the former refuses to allow the MCP entry into the political arena and demands screening of its members.
1956	Most of eastern Malaya has turned 'white'.
January-1956	During a conference in London a date is set for Malayan independence February and a constitution drafted.
August 1957	Malayan independence is declared. The high-commissioner hands over to Rahman, the federation's first prime minister. Until then the emergency has cost the British and Malayan governments £700,000,000.
1958	The communist insurgency largely collapses after two high-ranking leaders hand themselves in to the security forces.
1959	All security forces are concentrated on two remaining hard-core areas in the north.
1960	The emergency officially ends. Only approximately 400 communist rebels remain on the Thai border, including Chin Peng.
1989	A Thai-brokered ceasefire is signed by the Malaysian government and the insurgents. 'Peace' and 'friendship' villages are set up in southern Thailand for the remaining rebels. Due to Chin Peng's refusal to give up his beliefs, he is not allowed to return to Malaysia.

Source: R. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War: The Emergency in Malaya 1948-1960* (2003), pp. 183-8. R. F. Holland, *European Decolonization 1918-1981n Introductory Survey* (1985), pp. 103-12, K. Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia: Britain, Malaya and Singapore, 1941-1968* (2001), p. 139, C. Bayly & T. Harper, *Forgotten Wars: The End of Britain's Asian Empire* (2007), pp. 12-3, 449-56 and 473, A. Khoo, *Life as the River Flows: Women in the Malayan Anti-Colonial Struggle* (2007), p. 1, 'Review of the Emergency in Malaya from June 1948 to August 1957', by the Director of Operations Malaya to the War Office, September 1957, NA, WO 106/5990.

## Timetable of the Indochina War

Feb. 1930	<p>A small circle around Ho Chi Minh (alias Nguyen Tat Thanh/Ai Quoc) founds the Vietnamese Communist Party in Hong Kong. It is renamed Communist Party of Indochina (PCI) the following autumn.</p> <p>Peasants around Yen Bai (North Annam) revolt against mandarins and notables. The first autonomous soviets are established. The rebellion is not crushed until spring 1931.</p>
June 1940	<p>Following a Japanese ultimatum, Governor and General Catroux signs a treaty in which Nippon recognises French sovereignty in Indochina. In exchange the French accord the Japanese 'privileged treatment of imperial interests'. Further ultimatums and treaties follow, coupled with an influx of Japanese troops into Indochina.</p> <p><i>Vichyist</i> Admiral Decoux replaces Catroux who sides with de Gaulle.</p>
May 1941	<p>Upon re-entry into Indochina Ho Chi Minh founds the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi (League for the Independence of Vietnam), later simply referred to as Viet Minh. He and his followers aim for the unification of the three <i>kys</i> (Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina) and the establishment of a socialist state.</p>
July 1943	<p>The Permanent Military Committee in Alger decides to intervene in the Pacific and to set up an expeditionary corps, for which preparations begin in spring 1944.</p>
March 1944	<p>De Gaulle declares that France will not cede power in Indochina but proposes a federation of autonomous states.</p>
March 1945	<p>The Japanese occupy French administrative and military institutions imprisoning and/or killing most staff and troops. But roughly 6,000 men under Generals Sabattier and Alessandri escape into Chinese territory. Encouraged by the Japanese, Emperor Bai Dai proclaims Vietnam's independence. The rulers of Cambodia and Laos follow suit.</p>
August 1945	<p>The Allies decide at Potsdam to divide Indochina along the 16<sup>th</sup> parallel after the war and to temporarily allocate the north to the Chinese and the south to the British.</p> <p>Japan capitulates after the US drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.</p> <p>Following the outbreak of a revolution, Ho establishes a government in Hanoi, initially supported by other nationalist groups. Bao Dai abdicates.</p>

Sept. 1945	Ho proclaims an independent republic of Vietnam. Laos and Cambodia follow suit. In the ensuing insecurity 400 French and Eurasians are killed or abducted during the Heyraud massacre, probably by the Viet Minh. British troops, and the first detachments of the French expeditionary corps clash with Vietnamese nationalists in the ensuing months.
Oct. 1945	General Leclerc arrives with reinforcements in Saigon. The new high-commissioner, Admiral d'Argenlieu, follows a few days later.
Jan. 1946	British General Gracey hands over responsibility for southern Indochina to the French. The latter also negotiate a withdrawal with the Chinese in exchange for economic concessions in China.
March 1946	The Ho Chi Minh-Sainteny agreement spells out recognition of a free Vietnamese state within the Indochinese Federation and the French Union. It also foresees future negotiations over Vietnam's final status and French interests. A referendum should decide over unification of the three <i>kys</i> while French troops are to be withdrawn over five years.  After pacifying much of southern Indochina, French troops embark in Haiphong where skirmishes with the Chinese occur.
April and Aug. 1946	Conferences at Dalat between d'Argenlieu and (initially) Viet Minh, (other) Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian delegations over the future of Indochina produce little of substance.
June 1946	To the consternation of the Viet Minh the Republic of Cochinchina is proclaimed.
July-Sept. 1946	A conference at Fontainebleau between a Viet Minh delegation and the French government produces only a last-minute agreement on a <i>modus vivendi</i> .
Winter 1946	The French bombard Haiphong. This follows skirmishes with the Viet Minh as a result of disagreements over customs revenues. The latter attack the former in Hanoi and other larger towns. Ho declares war in December.
May 1947	President Ramadier expels communist ministers from the government, which allows the latter to openly agitate against the 'dirty war' in Indochina.
June 1948	The Bay of Along accords envision the establishment of a formally sovereign Vietnamese state within the French Union. Similar agreements are later signed with Laos and Cambodia. In all three cases France retains control over defence and foreign policy.

July and Nov. 1949	The state of Vietnam is proclaimed. Emperor Bao Dai becomes its head. Laos and Cambodia turn into associated states within the French Union.
Sept. 1949	The 'generals' affair' explodes after a critical report by chief-of-army staff General Revers is aired on a Viet Minh radio and printed copies circulate.
Oct. 1949	The Peoples' Republic of China comes into being. Communist troops arrive on the Vietnamese border by the end of the year.
1950	Following a month-long conference at Pau, France agrees to cede further powers to the three associated states, including customs, the following year.
March 1950	The arrest of Indochina veteran and anti-war activist Henri Martin leads to widespread protests in France and the former's eventual release.
June 1950	The first American material arrives in Indochina after the US and Great Britain recognise Bao Dai as legitimate leader of Vietnam. Earlier the USSR and China officially back Ho Chi Minh.
Oct. 1950	A badly conceived evacuation of the French garrison at Cao Bang results in the death and capture of roughly 5,000 French, Foreign Legion and African troops. Lang Son and other northern towns are abandoned while the French authorities prepare the evacuation of Hanoi.
Dec. 1950	Having been appointed commander-in-chief and high commissioner General de Lattre arrives in Indochina. He restructures the high command, initiates a line of fortifications in the Tonkin delta and pushes for the expansion of the nationalist armies of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Much of the latter is to be paid by the US, which eventually assumes 70% of the war's costs.
Jan.-Nov. 1951	Viet Minh General Giap orders a number of attacks on French positions, notably at Vinh Yen and Hoa Binh. None yields any gains but they result in heavy casualties.
Jan. 1952	Having left Indochina de Lattre succumbs to cancer. General Salan and High-Commissioner Letourneau succeed him.
Nov. 1952	Salan orders the set up of air-supported bases at Na San and Lai Chau. The former is successfully defended against repeated Viet Minh attacks.
March 1953	The Viet Minh penetrate Laos stopping short of taking Luang Prabang.  King Sihanouk embarks on his 'crusade for independence', thereby achieving military sovereignty for Cambodia by October.

May 1953	The Mayer government devaluates the Indochinese <i>piastre</i> to end the scandalous traffic with the currency. Relations with the associated states sour and France eventually has to grant them full independence.
Oct. 1953	Vietnam's National Congress rejects the French Union "in its current form".
Jan. 1954	Operation ' <i>Atlante</i> ' is launched along the central Annamese coast as part of the ' <i>Plan Navarre</i> '.
March 1954	The battle of Dien Bien Phu erupts following the establishment of a huge French garrison.
April 1954	The Geneva Conference begins with the aim to find solutions to the wars in Korea and Indochina.
May 1954	Dien Bien Phu falls. Roughly 15,000 men of the expeditionary corps are killed, injured, disappear or go into captivity. One day later delegations in Geneva turn to discussing Indochina.  French troops retreating from An Khe are almost wiped out through a series of Viet Minh ambushes.
June 1954	French and Vietnamese delegations sign a treaty of "independence and association". Ngo Dinh Diem becomes head of southern Vietnam toppling Bao Dai four months later.  Pierre Mendès France becomes French president. He vows to end the war within a month.  The peace conference in Geneva ends with an agreement to partition Indochina along the 17 <sup>th</sup> parallel into a communist north and a democratic south. But the envisioned country-wide elections never take place. In parallel French and Viet Minh troops are ordered to leave Laos and Cambodia. The war has cost France almost 3,000 billion francs.
Spring 1955	The 'war of the sects' breaks out in Cochinchina. Diem's troops succeed in breaking their power.
May 1955	French forces evacuate northern Vietnam, accompanied by roughly one million refugees.
April 1956	The last French troops leave southern Vietnam but a small garrison remains at Seno (Laos).

Sources: J. Dalloz, *La guerre d'Indochine 1945-1954* (1987), pp. 279-84, P. Masson, *Histoire de l'armée française de 1914 à nos jours* (2002), pp. 391-413, A. Clayton, *The Wars of French Decolonization* (1994), pp. 39-78, S. Tønnesson, 'The Longest Wars: Indochina 1945-1975', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 22, no. 1 (March 1985), pp. 9-29, P. Brocheux, 'L'homme qui devient Ho Chi Minh', *Les collections de l'histoire: Indochine - Vietnam: colonisation, guerres et communisme*, no. 23 (April-June 2004), pp. 32-6 and M. Bigeard, *Ma guerre d'Indochine* (2004), chronology (book contains no page numbers).

## Introduction

### Remembering the wars and Southeast Asia

On June 6, 2007 up to one hundred British veterans of the Malayan Emergency and family members attended the opening ceremony of 'Malaysia Week' in Covent Garden. This followed an invitation of the Malaysian government to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the country's independence. During the opening ceremony the veterans and their relatives watched as carefully selected Malay, Chinese and Indian singers and dancers performed on stage. After the show much of the audience proceeded to the various artefact and food stands. Ultimately, though, the veterans' main target was a large tent reserved for them. There they recounted their tours, while throwing in a few anecdotes from recent travels to Southeast Asia.

The public gathering and travelling appears to be a newer phenomenon. Back in the 1950s and 1960s the majority of returning servicemen put their military service behind them, unless they decided to become regular soldiers. Most of the over 4,000 members,<sup>1</sup> who eventually joined the National Malaya and Borneo Veterans' Association (NMBVA), did so in the autumn of their lives. The association was founded on June 1, 1994 in Nottingham. It resulted from a meeting between veterans two years earlier who had attended a reunion in Malaysia. The original aim consisted in obtaining medals for those who had served in Southeast Asia during WWII and the ensuing conflicts in Malaya and Borneo.<sup>2</sup> The association, which grew out of it, now boasts over twenty branches with members in Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Fiji, Singapore and the US.<sup>3</sup> During the regular branch meetings and at above celebration there is an underlying theme: pride in having done their part in steering Malay(si)a towards independence, democracy, stability and prosperity.

The jokes and laughter that one could overhear during 'Malaysia Week' stands in stark contrast to the lingering anger and sadness felt by French veterans of the Indochina War. Many of the survivors are today members of the *Association nationale des anciens et amis de l'Indochine et du souvenir indochinois* (ANAI), if they have not opted for the umbrella organisation, the *Union nationale des combattants* (UNC).

On a visit to the ANAI on November 11, 2006 I entered grey and sparsely illuminated offices where a small staff was silently going about its business. The organisation's administrative director, Henri Dupont, received me with a mixture of curiosity and apprehension. The latter visibly disappeared from his face when I explained my research. After leaving me to sift through brochures and books Dupont casually informed me that he had served in Hanoi's headquarters during the Indochina War. There he had received the frantic messages of his colleagues encircled in Dien Bien Phu. When asked whether he had ever returned to Southeast Asia, the director

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<sup>1</sup> The figure includes veterans of the confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia from 1963 to 1966, in which British and Commonwealth forces assisted the former.

<sup>2</sup> The Malaysian government issued medals to British soldiers who served in the country between 1957 (independence) and 1960.

<sup>3</sup> Information provided by webmaster Annie Burden by e-mail on 26.7.2010.

responded in the negative. He argued somewhat enigmatically that his memories were those of a twenty-year old. What he did not spell out is that a return might have revived traumatic images.

Judging from the journals studied at the ANAI, celebrations by French veterans appear to be rather sombre occasions. Images feature serious-looking, elderly men in dark suits displaying impressive rows of medals and carrying flags. This frame of mind also shines through photographs of the war's most revered figure, former paratrooper, General Marcel Bigeard. The latter visited Vietnam, including Dien Bien Phu, in 1994 for the purpose of a book. On its back Bigeard is quoted as stating: "I have always said that I would not return to Dien Bien Phu but reduced to ashes and wrapped in a parachute. However, forty years later, I have come back to pay my respect to the young men of twenty years who died for France."<sup>4</sup> Contrary to most of his colleagues and his British counterparts, Bigeard met his former opponents during his return, most notably Colonel Pham Xuan Phuang. As a young captain the latter had stood on the other side of the battlefield. He now received Bigeard as representative of Vietnamese veterans. During their encounter presents were exchanged and experiences shared in an atmosphere of respect but with the knowledge that ideologies were still miles apart.<sup>5</sup> Another returning visitor, Colonel Allaire, recalled scenes of the battle in the company of another former opponent, Nguyen Dinh Ti for a French documentary. What is most striking about their meeting is that the latter continuously attempted to look his French counterpart in the eyes, while Allaire stared into the sky.<sup>6</sup>

Given the relative indifference of the French public at the time, it is ironic that the succeeding generations in general and the art scene in particular have taken a keen interest in (former) Indochina over the last two decades. The area has become a favourite destination for French tourists and investors.<sup>7</sup> An exhibition on Angkor Wat at Paris' *grand palais* in 1996 attracted large numbers of visitors. On an official level, too, relations have long been revived. Vietnam has been a member of the *Agence intergouvernementale de la francophonie* since 1970, for which the government staged a conference in Hanoi during November 1997. Meanwhile, a once ambivalent French government has paid tribute to its soldiers. While the Algerian War remained a taboo until the late 1990s, President Mitterrand unveiled a memorial for the Indochina War in Fréjus on February 16, 1993.<sup>8</sup> Nowadays Paris even features a tiny *Square des combattants d'Indochine*.<sup>9</sup>

1992 also saw three comparatively successful, and in two cases award-winning, films on Indochina: *Indochine* by Régis Wargnier (whose father fought in the war), Jean-Jacques Annaud's *L'amant* and Pierre Schoendorffer's *Dien Bien Phu*. The latter, who had served as a cameraman in the war, had already directed *La 317<sup>e</sup> section* in 1965 and *Le crabe tambour* in 1977, both based on his earlier novels.

<sup>4</sup> Bigeard, *Ma guerre d'Indochine*.

<sup>5</sup> Despite a recent economic liberalisation Vietnam is officially still a communist country.

<sup>6</sup> See D. Rousselier, *Vietnam, la première guerre* (documentary film, 2005/6).

<sup>7</sup> The director of Vietnam's national tourism administration outlined in 2006 that between 1996 and 2005 the number of French tourists travelling to Vietnam had increased from 87,000 to 126,402. At the time France also ranked seventh among countries investing in Vietnam's tourism infrastructure, having spent 188 million dollars. The director nevertheless expressed his desire for more visitors and ventures. See: [www.lalettrediplomatique.fr/contribution\\_detail.php?id=9&idrub=9&idrubprod=31](http://www.lalettrediplomatique.fr/contribution_detail.php?id=9&idrub=9&idrubprod=31).

<sup>8</sup> [www.memorial-indochine.org](http://www.memorial-indochine.org).

<sup>9</sup> R. Aldrich, 'Putting the Colonies on the Map: Colonial Names in Paris Streets' in T. Chafer & A. Sackur, *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France* (2002), p. 220.



In view of this fascination, Nicola Cooper has noted that: "... Indochina seems to have lent itself more readily than France's other former colonial possessions to a nostalgic, complacent, backward-looking and exoticising view." *Indochine* and *Dien Bien Phu* in particular "... seem symptomatic of a culture which is still reluctant to fully embrace a post-colonial identity and thereby relinquish its control over the history and culture of its Asian Other."<sup>10</sup> The author would probably have been equally dismissive of the latest film adaption of Marguerite Duras' 1958 novel *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*, even though the director, Rithy Panh, is Cambodian.<sup>11</sup>

Despite their questionable tones, the films represent an active artistic effort, which is not evident in the case of Malaya or the emergency. The closest Britain – or its film and media industry respectively – has come to remembering them are one radio and one TV documentary of note.<sup>12</sup> In both productions the Southeast Asian territory and conflict merely form part of wider topics, i.e. National Service and British counter-insurgency campaigns at the end of empire. This compares with at least three printed press collections, two TV and one longer radio documentary on the Indochina War alone.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps British veterans are not too unhappy with this state of affairs. Some might fear too much exposure of and credit to their former foes. When Chin Peng, published his memoirs<sup>14</sup> some British veterans were appalled by what they regarded as printed lies. Many also seem to support the refusal of the Malaysian government to allow Chin Peng's return. A few would go even further. Former National Serviceman Tony Rodgers suggested that the communist leader be transported south in the traditional way of the emergency – dangling from a pole.<sup>15</sup> It is not difficult to imagine the reaction to a highly critical book on the counter-insurgency effort in Malaya (yet to be written), if one considers the storm, which erupted after the publication of David Anderson's and Caroline Elkins' books on the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya.<sup>16</sup>

Despite differing responses in Britain and France, the veterans of the Southeast Asian conflicts share things. They have generally guarded strong memories of their tours. They regularly pay tributes to their fallen comrades.<sup>17</sup> Members of both groups feel that their efforts and conflicts have been forgotten by their governments and the population at large. In both cases their struggles have been overshadowed by later, noisier, bloodier and nearer conflicts: Algeria in France's case, Northern Ireland in Britain's.

<sup>10</sup> N. Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (2001), pp. 203-18 (quotes pp. 205 and 218).

<sup>11</sup> The film hit the screens in 2009 and starred Isabelle Huppert.

<sup>12</sup> C. Wheeler, *The Peacetime Conscripts*, BBC Radio 4 (2000/1) and K. Townsend & J. Ash, *Empire Warriors: The British Empire at War, 1945-1967*, documentary, BBC 2 (2004/6).

<sup>13</sup> *Historama-Historia Spécial*, no. 28, *La guerre d'Indochine, 1946-1954: les vraies raisons d'une défaite* (March-April 1994), *Les collections de l'histoire*, no. 23, *Le Monde, Dossiers & Documents*, no. 331, *Les guerres d'Indochine* (May 2004), F. Albert, *Le silence des rizières* (2003), Rousselier, *Vietnam, la première guerre* and P. Gélinet/Radio France, *La guerre d'Indochine 1945-54* (1991).

<sup>14</sup> I. Ward, I. O. Miraflor and Chin Peng, *My Side of History: Alias Chin Peng* (2003). Chin Peng subsequently engaged in discussions with academics and veterans. The result is C. C. Chin's and K. Hack's (eds.), *Dialogues With Chin Peng: New Light on the Malayan Communist Party* (2004).

<sup>15</sup> Interview, 21.8.2006. Rogers had served with an infantry battalion.

<sup>16</sup> D. Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya* (2005/6) and C. Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (2005). Anderson gave a paper, titled *An Empire of Atrocities? Coming to Terms With Britain's Colonial Past* at Senate House on 5.12.2005. He informed the audience that mostly ex-colonial administrators had threatened him and Elkins with lawsuits, disruption of lectures and even criminal actions, while discouraging people from reading the books.

<sup>17</sup> George Tullis, former head of the NMBVA, compiled a complete roll of honour, listing all British and Commonwealth casualties of the emergency and the site of graves to facilitate visits.

## Thesis aims and hypotheses

The parallels and differences in recollection partly explain the origins and purpose of this thesis. The other part stems from my long-standing interest in decolonisation, especially the experiences of those 'at the sharp' end of it.

As the title suggests, the thesis represents a study of how British and French soldiers' reacted to and have remembered the conflicts raging in Malaya and Indochina during the 1940s and 1950s. Equally, it deals with soldierly perceptions and recollections of the area and its peoples. One can deduce from the vast literature on imperial culture, to be discussed below, that these responses and impressions were in many cases coloured by images conveyed through the media, literature, art, music and other vehicles in Britain and France prior to military tours in Southeast Asia. In addition to recapitulating reactions to the conflicts, environment and populations, the thesis seeks to verify if and to what extent such influences can be traced in military memory. The project thus represents an attempt at detecting what colonial representations servicemen brought to the region, what they recorded during their service, how they categorised these imprints, and what they took back in terms of remembrance.

The questions, arguments and structure of the thesis are largely a result of the available sources and their content, particularly in the case of interviews and questionnaires. While I held vague assumptions about soldiers' experiences at the beginning of my research, i.e. at least some military awareness of Britain's and France's shrinking realms and a degree of familiarity with Southeast Asia, I eventually put these aside to make room for veterans' own tales – partly because the latter diverged from my suppositions. From these I picked the parts that I regarded as most original and fascinating. The majority of books on the British and French counter-insurgency efforts in Southeast Asia have centred on military themes. Unsurprisingly it is also what most veterans tend to discuss. Yet I was most struck by their statements on colonial politics, development, race, sex and nature – in so far as they have issued any of note. These tales then determined the final form of the written work. The result is in some ways a military history largely devoid of weaponry and battles.

Generally speaking, this research project has uncovered rather uniform opinions and technical attitudes on the British side in regard to Malaya, its communities, the emergency and the opposition. Cold War and military-strategic deliberations have weighed much heavier in soldierly assessments than social, economic, ethnic, cultural and environmental dimensions. For many veterans this is natural. As one drily remarked: "We were fighting a joint enemy, not taking a poll."<sup>18</sup> While the chapters provide evidence of such attitudes they also echo alternative and more compound opinions. These have been voiced by men with somewhat distinctive backgrounds or placed in particular situations at the time.

In comparison, French military memories betray more curious, emotional, critical and independent-minded protagonists, who have frequently pondered extensively on their roles in the

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<sup>18</sup> Questionnaire filled out by Terence Haley on 5.6.2007. He served in the territory as a National Serviceman and in the infantry.

Indochina War, natural challenges as well as on interactions with friends and foes. The result is a greater variety in evaluations of the conflict, the enemy, Indochina and its peoples depending on personal situations. While social origins, time and nature of military tours, pre-emergency events, official information and the conflicts' outcomes all played their part in the varying output, the thesis also implies that differing cultural norms have shaped viewpoints and behavioural patterns. In other words: army personnel from the two countries might simply have been encouraged or discouraged to reflect on their tasks based on national and military traditions. That in turn can offer clues as to why decolonisation proved a more painful process for the French than the British military. Such a possibility constitutes one of the original and underlying *raison d'être*s of this project.

These results go against contemporary academic assessments inasmuch as the term 'decolonisation' has not figured as prominently in soldierly remembrance as it does in contemporary literature dealing with the period and the area. Similarly, they suggest that scholars have either overstated or downplayed the extent of imperial culture in Britain and France when the reality was rather less clear-cut for those potentially influenced by it.

The dissimilar stances and reactions of the two forces explain the choice of two case studies. A comparison tends to allow for broader conclusions while highlighting nuances and parallels. In view of developments during WWII, the nature of the conflicts raging there following VJ-Day, the communist opposition, the duration of the wars and the comparable regional settings, Southeast Asia seemed a sensible choice for such a comparison. I thus follow in the once lonely footsteps of Robert Holland, who introduced a first comparative outline on decolonisation in 1985 and one on emergencies in 1994.<sup>19</sup> The timing for the first book was no coincidence. The author saw obstacles to an earlier publication stating: "...while most constituents of the old empires had been shunted into the post-colonial age, there were always enough awkward survivals [...] to keep alive befuddling myths and rhetoric."<sup>20</sup> It is only recently that Lawrence Butler, Bob Moore and Martin Thomas went down the same route, as did Martin Shipway. The former three have detected limits but also many parallels in European decolonisation, among them "a sluggish public realization [in imperial European countries] of what was being done in their name in the colonial territories".<sup>21</sup> When the realisation set in and triggered responses, as during Suez and the Algerian War, it might have led, as Shipway has suggested, to "a post-colonial disillusion" in Britain and France.<sup>22</sup>

One might ask why European soldiers and colonial conflicts in Southeast Asia deserve special attention. One answer is simple: Little has changed since John MacKenzie lamented that "colonial warfare has been ill-served by historians" and that "We need many more [...] studies."<sup>23</sup> In particular we are still lacking academic analyses of British soldiers' voices during the imperial

<sup>19</sup> R. F. Holland, *European Decolonization 1918-1981: An Introductory Survey* (1985) and (as editor), *Emergencies and Disorder in the European Empires after 1945* (1994). In fairness one should also mention J.-L. Miège's earlier *Expansion européenne et décolonisation: de 1870 à nos jours* (1975). Yet the year 1870 in the title betrays a distinctly French angle.

<sup>20</sup> Preface.

<sup>21</sup> M. Thomas, B. Moore & L. J. Butler, *Crises of Empire: Decolonization and Europe's Imperial States, 1918-1975* (2008), p. 425.

<sup>22</sup> M. Shipway, *Decolonization and its Impact: A Comparative Approach to the End of the Colonial Empires* (2008), p. 239.

<sup>23</sup> J. M. MacKenzie (ed.), *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850-1950* (1992), pp. 221-2.

sunset – as opposed to earlier periods. David Killingray and David Omissi did edit a collection of essays dealing with the forces guarding the borders and interior of colonial territories. In so doing they have highlighted the crucial contribution to colonial control these relatively few, mostly loyal and non-European mercenaries made.<sup>24</sup> Very recently, Killingray and Martin Plaut followed up with a study of Africans fighting for Britain during WWII – a conflict, the authors have argued, that lasted much longer for them than for Europeans.<sup>25</sup> Yet neither of these books cover Southeast Asia after WWII or European servicemen. Four non-academic authors have made up for this but their focus has largely laid on conditions, equipment, strategies and battles.<sup>26</sup> Political aspects have dominated more in the works of David French and Hugh Strachan. Both have paid attention to (the end of) empire in their works on the British military but not exclusively so. French mainly sought to find references in Britain's military past that might guide contemporary planners.<sup>27</sup> Journalist Trevor Royle for his part wrote what is now a standard work on National Service, including a chapter on the Malayan Emergency.<sup>28</sup> As the title suggests though, the work largely leaves out professional soldiers. Otherwise, a long list of books by regimental historians exists, which depict the various campaigns of individual regiments over the centuries.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, chapters on Malaya, if they exist, tend to be fairly short and technical. The area is treated in more depth in Thomas Mockaitis' and John Nagl's recent publications<sup>30</sup> but their emphasis is, again, on the conflict's lessons. The latter have had personal and very direct relevance for Nagl who participated in both Iraq wars and has taught at West Point. Perhaps with the first Iraq campaign in mind, Mockaitis has emphasised the continuing relevance of minimal force.<sup>31</sup>

Although not necessarily concerned with the military, the strategies behind the crushing of (potential) revolts has also caught the attention of Martin Thomas. In his latest book he has outlined the precariousness of inherently unjust colonial rule in North Africa and the Middle East during the interwar years, and the reliance on intelligence to control disaffected communities.<sup>32</sup> Despite their quality, these publications do not usually address views of those on the spot regarding (the retreat from) empire, colonial territories and communities.

In the French case a considerable literature, often featuring testimonials, can be found which covers the wars of decolonisation. However, the dominant themes have centred on the conditions of war and the reasons for the military and political disasters in the 1950s and 1960s. Due to epic battles like Dien Bien Phu, the controversial 1961 putsch in Algiers and the mythical status of the

<sup>24</sup> D. Killingray and D. E. Omissi (eds.), *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c. 1700-1964* (1999), pp. 1-24.

<sup>25</sup> D. Killingray with M. Plaut, *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War* (2010), p. 8. It is possible that Killingray was inspired by his erstwhile collaborator, Anthony Clayton, who wrote a similar book but covering French Africa and a lengthier period. It is titled *France, Soldiers and Africa* (1988).

<sup>26</sup> (Major) M. Tugwell (ed.), *The Unquiet Peace: Stories from the Post-War Army* (1957), C. Allen, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Soldiers' Voices 1945-1989* (1990), A. Walker, *Six Campaigns: National Servicemen on Active Service 1948-1960* (1993) and R. Neillands, *A Fighting Retreat: The British Empire 1947-1997* (1996).

<sup>27</sup> D. French, *The British Way in Warfare, 1688-2000* (1990). One should also mention his more recent work *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army and the British People, c. 1870-2000* (2005). Strachan's main title is *The Politics of the British Army* (1997).

<sup>28</sup> T. Royle, *The Best Years of Their Lives: The National Service Experience 1945-63* (1986).

<sup>29</sup> A relevant title is J. Baynes, *The History of the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)*, vol. 4: *The Close of Empire 1948-1968*. (1971).

<sup>30</sup> J. A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (2002).

<sup>31</sup> T. R. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era, 1919-1960* (1995), pp. 143-6.

<sup>32</sup> M. Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (2008).

Foreign Legion though, the French military has generally been closer associated with the empire and its demise than its British counterpart. Authors have regularly taken either the 1940 armistice or the end of WWII as a starting point and the Algerian War as a culmination. Raoul Girardet sought to explain the roots of the military's worsening malaise by citing issues with recruitment and composition.<sup>33</sup> Like many non-French, Georg Kelly and Alistair Horne saw the difficulties more in inflexible leadership, ossified hierarchies and political meddling.<sup>34</sup>

The wide interest in the French military has led to collections, which often cover several decades, some of them compiled by non-academics.<sup>35</sup> This might explain why not all of these publications entail central arguments but summarise events. Regardless of the outlook of these works, empire and decolonisation automatically seeped into the chapters due to the intensive colonial wars. One of the most interesting publications is Eric Duhamel's, Olivier Forcade's and Philippe Vial's *Militaires en République, 1870-1962: les officiers, le pouvoir et la vie publique en France* (1999). Its title hints at the existence of a body more politicised than its British counterpart. Yet, despite military attempts to interfere with politics, the authors have reminded their readers that such excursions have been the exception rather than the rule.<sup>36</sup>

Still one of the best overviews of the military's role during decolonisation has come from Anthony Clayton, who has also published on the British military, empire and counter-insurgency.<sup>37</sup> He has attributed the French military's difficulty of coming to terms with the politics of decolonisation to the absence of a consolidating break after WWII, the lack of suitable doctrines, a "thinking in absolutes" and a tendency to overreact.<sup>38</sup> The importance of WWII is exemplified in Martin Thomas' *The French Empire at War 1940-1945* (1998), which depicts the struggle for control in the empire between Vichy and the Free French. Martin Alexander<sup>39</sup> and Martin Evans<sup>40</sup> for their part, have paid special attention to the French Army and the Algerian War. While the former has concentrated on strategic and political aspects, Evans has relied heavily upon testimonials.

The academic silence in Britain regarding soldiers and decolonisation puzzles if one considers that the army and the police habitually were the first in line when colonial troubles broke out. Hence the fitting title of Georgina Sinclair's book *At the End of the Line: Colonial Policing and the Imperial Endgame, 1945-80* (2006). Her point in regard to policing in Malaya and Hong Kong – that attempts to introduce a "more civil side" to the force's tasks were hampered by the threat of the Cold War<sup>41</sup> – contradicts to some degree Richard Stubb's deliberations. In his view the

<sup>33</sup> R. Girardet, *La crise militaire française, 1945-1962: aspects sociologiques et idéologiques* (1964).

<sup>34</sup> G. A. Kelly, *Lost Soldiers: The French Army and Empire in Crisis, 1947-1962* (1965) and A. Horne, *The French Army and Politics, 1870-1970* (1984).

<sup>35</sup> J. Nobecourt, *Une histoire politique de l'armée. vol. 1: de Pétain à Pétain, 1919-1942* (1967), J. Planchais, vol. 2: *de de Gaulle à de Gaulle, 1940-1967* (1967), P. Carles, *Des millions de soldats inconnus: la vie de tous les jours dans les Armées de la IV République* (1982) and P. Masson, *Histoire de l'armée française de 1914 à nos jours* (2002). Carles made his name through film documentaries while Planchais specialised as a journalist in military matters for *Le Monde* before becoming the newspaper's editor-in-chief.

<sup>36</sup> P. 704.

<sup>37</sup> See for instance: *The British Empire as a Superpower, 1919-1939* (1986).

<sup>38</sup> *The Wars of French Decolonization* (1994), p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> The latest publications are (with J. F. V. Keiger) (ed.), *France and the Algerian War, 1954-1962: Strategy, Operations and Diplomacy* (2002) and (with K. Mouré) *Crisis and Renewal in France, 1918-1962* (2002).

<sup>40</sup> Two examples from a very long list: *The Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War (1954-1962)* (1997) and (with J. Phillips) *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed* (2007).

<sup>41</sup> P. 185.

government's "abandonment of a coercion and enforcement approach in favour of hearts and minds" proved crucial and left a relatively peaceful legacy in Malay(si)a.<sup>42</sup>

Surprise about the literary hole in Britain also owes to the imperial tradition that ran as much in the British forces as it did in the French. Branches like the Indian Army owed their existence to imperial conquest and policing. As a result and as shown by MacKenzie, the military often appeared in popular literature, film, music and education.<sup>43</sup> One would therefore assume that the impact of decolonisation proved particularly intense in these circles. This project aims, among the previously mentioned goals, to investigate whether that was actually the case. As it turned out, the responses were rather muted or would come later.

As pointed out, veterans have habitually complained that the emergency and the Indochina War represent forgotten conflicts. However, the literature doesn't necessarily bear out such a claim. Neither are colonial rule in Southeast Asia and its end neglected subjects. What justifies this thesis is its angle, i.e. an academic analysis of soldiers voices during decolonisation.

To underline the absence of such an approach in the existing body of work on British Malaya and the emergency, it is worth having a look at the latter. As regards the conflict, an early but ground-breaking work by Anthony Short<sup>44</sup> was followed by a long pause. A second wave followed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, led by Richard Stubbs' previously-mentioned book. It is no coincidence that by then the 30-year closure of governmental documents was coming to an end. Six years after Stubbs Simon Smith analysed relations between the Malay sultans and the British authorities before and during the emergency. In so doing he has outlined how both the British administration and the independent Malaysian government underestimated the sultans' influence and popularity at their peril.<sup>45</sup> Anthony Milner followed with a related work on nationalism and Tim Harper with a study on the social, political and economic aspects of the emergency.<sup>46</sup> Karl Hack, who has questioned Short's and Stubbs' preoccupation with General Templer or hearts and minds respectively,<sup>47</sup> and Tobias Rettig later turned their focus on British defence in Southeast Asia. They have highlighted the unsuccessful British attempt to reduce military commitments in the area until the final departure.<sup>48</sup> Shortly before them Margaret Shennan presented one of few depictions of the British expatriate community in Malaya since Somerset-Maughan's *Far Eastern Tales*.<sup>49</sup> Finally, the years 2004 and 2007 saw the publication of Christopher Bayly's and Tim Harper's

<sup>42</sup> R. Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960* (1989), p. 264.

<sup>43</sup> J. M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (1984), pp. 80-1, 210-3 and 228-30.

<sup>44</sup> A. Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya, 1948-60* (London, 1975). Short's work is particularly intriguing because of his involvement in the emergency and his subsequent, almost unrestricted access to governmental records. A new edition was published in 2000 titled *In Pursuits of Mountain Rats: The Communist Insurrection in Malaya*.

<sup>45</sup> S. C. Smith, *British Relations with the Malay Rulers: From Decentralization to Malayan Independence, 1930-1957* (1995).

<sup>46</sup> A. Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya: Contesting Nationalism and the Expansion of the Public Sphere* (1994) and T. N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (1998).

<sup>47</sup> See K. Hack, "'Iron Claws on Malaya': The Historiography of the Malayan Emergency", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 30, 1 (March 1999), pp. 99-125.

<sup>48</sup> K. Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in South-East Asia: Britain, Malaya and Singapore 1941-1968* (2001) and K. Hack & T. Rettig (eds.), *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia* (2006).

<sup>49</sup> M. Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya, 1880-1960* (2000). W. Somerset-Maughan's tales came out in a new edition in 1993.

volumes on Britain's wars in Southeast Asia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>50</sup> The work of these two scholars has lent a voice to many ordinary men and women involved in and affected by the turmoil.

Perhaps still the most important specialist on Malaya remains Anthony Stockwell. In addition to his *British Documents on the End of Empire* volumes,<sup>51</sup> he has contributed various articles on aspects accompanying decolonisation in the area.<sup>52</sup> Among them also features a little known piece written for the BBC History Magazine, in which Stockwell has argued against using the emergency as a blueprint for other counter-insurgency campaigns, particularly Iraq, due to its unique ethnic and political circumstances.<sup>53</sup>

While the Algerian War has dwarfed France's presence in and departure from Indochina the latter has still triggered a greater literary output than (the exit from) Malaya. Nicola Cooper has nevertheless complained that much of this literature has centred on the war – a complaint that one could repeat in regard to Malaya. She has insisted that colonial Indochina still offers scope for research. She herself has filled some gaps by analysing French perceptions and representations of the territory, as opposed to the reality experienced by colonisers and colonised between 1900 and 1939. Cooper has come to the conclusion that Indochina represented for the French on the one hand “a discursive construction, a mythical, dreamed-for place” but also “a very real lived experience, both for the subjugated peoples and for the Europeans who settled in Indochina.”<sup>54</sup>

Yet, as her own bibliography demonstrates, Indochina has long occupied French and foreign minds. Administrators, explorers and writers, such as Marshal Lyautey, Pierre Loti, André Malraux, Marguerite Duras and Graham Greene passed on early images of the exotic lands.<sup>55</sup> Admittedly, it took a while for academics to produce studies of the French presence there. One of the first works was Pierre Brocheux', William Duiker's, Claude Hesse D'Alzon's and Paul Isoart's *L'Indochine française 1940-45* (1982), which was quickly succeeded by Charles Meyer's *La vie quotidienne des français en Indochine 1860-1910* (1985). Meyer was well placed to produce such a study, having lived and worked in Vietnam and Cambodia from 1945 to 1970.

The 1990s saw Valerie Daniel's *La Francophonie au Vietnam* (1992), as well as Pierre Brocheux's and Daniel Hémary's *Indochine, la colonisation ambiguë, 1858-1954* (1995). The two specialists have highlighted the French inability to win over especially Vietnamese hearts during roughly one hundred years of domination. The result, as they have put it, was not a “decolonisation but a revolution” resulting in a renewed form of domination – communism.<sup>56</sup> Luc Garcia for his part has scrutinised missionary activities in Vietnam between 1920 and 1960. In

<sup>50</sup> C. A. Bayly & T. N. Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain's Asian Empire and the War With Japan* (2004) and *Forgotten Wars: The End of Britain's Asian Empire* (2007).

<sup>51</sup> The most relevant being his edited *Malaya, part II: The Communist Insurrection, 1948-1953* (BDEE, series B, vol. 3) (1995). The two others in the series are *Malaya, Part I: The Malayan Union Experiment, 1942-1948* and *Malaya, Part III: The Alliance Route to Independence, 1953-1957* (1995).

<sup>52</sup> An important one is his article 'British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya, 1942-52' in the *Journal of Imperial And Commonwealth History*, xiii, 1 (1984), pp. 68-87. It is discussed in some detail in chapter 3.

<sup>53</sup> 'Looking for a Way out', *BBC History Magazine*, vol. 7, no. 3, (March 2006), pp. 46-9 (reprinted in the NMBVA Journal 2006).

<sup>54</sup> Cooper, *France in Indochina*, 2.

<sup>55</sup> P. Loti, *Un pèlerin d'Angkor* (1912), Marshal Lyautey, *Lettres du Tonkin et de Madagascar, 1894-1899* (1920), A. Malraux, *La voie royale* (1934), M. Duras, *L'amant* (1984), G. Greene, *The Quiet American* (1955) and *Ways of Escape* (1980).

<sup>56</sup> P. 370.

doing so he has highlighted the limited penetration of the church into Vietnamese society and the uncertain allegiance of the converted in the face of growing nationalism.<sup>57</sup> The powerful *Banque de l'Indochine* has inspired two studies.<sup>58</sup> Pierre Franchini and the controversial George Boudarel<sup>59</sup> edited fascinating, larger volumes on Saigon and Hanoi, in which they have drawn attention to the link between the cities' structure and communities.<sup>60</sup> Panivong Norindr looked behind the colonial stereotypes unmasking them as constructed myths.<sup>61</sup> Finally in 2003, Eric Deroo and Pierre Vallaud brought out a new survey spanning one hundred years of the French presence.<sup>62</sup>

David Marr has covered the span between earliest nationalist agitation and the Vietnamese revolution of 1945 in *Vietnamese Anticolonialism 1885-1925* (1971), *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-45* (1981) and *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (1995). In the first cited he has outlined the different strands of nationalism and their merger in the crucial years between 1925 and 1945. In so doing he has flagged up the failure of traditional resistance leading to a search for alternatives outside Vietnam.<sup>63</sup> Martin Shipway produced a detailed analysis of the tensions between the colonial administration and metropolitan governments prior to the outbreak of the war.<sup>64</sup> The latter itself has resulted in a large number of books by French, British and American authors. It includes Jacques Dalloz' standard work *La guerre d'Indochine, 1945-54* (1987),<sup>65</sup> Alain Ruscio's *La guerre française d'Indochine: 1945-1954* (1992)<sup>66</sup> and Pierre Brocheux's (as editor) *Du conflit d'Indochine aux conflits indochinois* (2000). The latter complements the existing literature in pointing to often overlooked themes. Among them figure the pre-colonial, hegemonic aspirations of the Dai Viet dynasty and the Angkor empire, which spilled into the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the form of tensions between the Vietnamese and the (Cambodian) Khmer.<sup>67</sup>

Quiang Zhai offered a much-needed glimpse into Chinese deliberations in *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (2000). Hugue Tertrais took stock of the conflict's costs in *La piastre et le fusil: le coût de la guerre d'Indochine, 1945-1954* (2002). Finally, Eric Deroo and Christophe Dutrône edited a fresh portrait of the enemy in *Le Viet-Minh* (2009). And then there is Michel Bodin. He has delivered the most meticulous digests of archival documents held at the *Service historique de la défense* (SHD),<sup>68</sup> complementing them with interviews and memoirs. The result are *La France et ses soldats, Indochine 1945-1954* (1996), *Soldats d'Indochine, 1945-54* (1997), *Les combattants français face à la guerre d'Indochine, 1945-1954* (1998), *Les Africains dans la*

<sup>57</sup> L. Garcia, *Quand les missionnaires rencontraient les vietnamiens (1920-1960)* (2008), which neatly adds to Patrick Tuck's *French Catholic Missionaries and the Politics of Imperialism in Vietnam, 1857-1914: A Documentary Survey* (1987).

<sup>58</sup> M. Meuleau, *Des pionniers en Extrême-Orient: histoire de la Banque de l'Indochine, 1875-1975* (1990) and Y. Gonjo, *Banque coloniale ou banque d'affaires: la banque de l'Indochine sous la III<sup>e</sup> République* (1993).

<sup>59</sup> See chapter 4.

<sup>60</sup> P. Franchini (dir.), *Saigon, 1925-1945: de la 'Belle Colonie' à l'éclosion révolutionnaire, ou la fin des dieux blancs* (1993) and G. Boudarel and Nguyen Van Ky, *Hanoi 1936-1996: du drapeau rouge au billet vert* (1997).

<sup>61</sup> P. Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film and Literature* (1996).

<sup>62</sup> E. Deroo & P. Vallaud, *L'Indochine française, 1856-1956: guerres, mythes et passions* (2003).

<sup>63</sup> Pp. 274-6.

<sup>64</sup> M. Shipway, *The Road to War: France and Vietnam, 1944-1947* (1996).

<sup>65</sup> Dalloz has also compiled a *Dictionnaire de la guerre d'Indochine 1945-1954* in 2006.

<sup>66</sup> Ruscio entered the scene with his earlier work *Les communistes français et la guerre d'Indochine, 1944-1954* (1984).

<sup>67</sup> See in particular Monique Chemillier-Gendreau's contribution in the book: 'Les Etats de l'ex-Indochine et les conflits territoriaux', pp. 103-120

<sup>68</sup> Formerly *Service historique de l'armée de terre* (SHAT).



*guerre d'Indochine, 1947-1954* (2000), *Dictionnaire de la guerre d'Indochine 1945-1954* (2004) as well as numerous articles.<sup>69</sup> While these books provide a wealth of information on composition, numbers, conditions in Indochina and reactions in France, one thirsts for central arguments, particularly on decolonisation.

In addition to above, a number of collections depicting soldiers' lives and struggles in Indochina have appeared. The authors have included former protagonists, journalists, writers and even a film director. Further, three illustrated books are available with numerous archival images of the war.<sup>70</sup> While none of these works necessarily propagates a particular argument, they remind us of the media's relatively close observation of the conflict. Despite this impressive output, Daniel Hémery has lamented that most of these publications have focused on political choices, economic implications, military events and metropolitan reactions as well as on "circumscribed, social and cultural spaces".<sup>71</sup> It is hoped that this research project fills some of the gaps.

### Structure, research questions and scope

The thesis is arranged into three main parts, each featuring a 'British' and a 'French' section. Chapters one and two detail, supported by appendices A to D, the composition, build-up, command structures and cooperation with civilian bodies of the anti-communist forces engaged in Southeast Asia. In parallel they highlight the pressures on both the British and French military resulting from demobilisation, other imperial trouble spots and NATO commitments, as well as from rising human and financial costs in Southeast Asia. In both cases the authorities attempted to overcome these difficulties through conscription, local recruitment and import of non-British and non-French personnel. As the section indicates, these measures resulted in rather heterogeneous forces but did not necessarily bring about the desired results in both theatres.

A closer examination of the forces engaged in Southeast Asia seemed necessary to me because some of the earlier-quoted books on the conflicts and military can sometimes give the misleading impression of rather anonymous and homogenous forces. One exception here is Robert Jackson's *The Malayan Emergency: The Commonwealth Wars 1948-1966* (1991),<sup>72</sup> which by its title insinuates the diverse military apparatus engaged in Malaya. The two chapters and the supporting appendices are also helpful because they offer insight into a large section of British and French society at the time, i.e. men and women between the ages of eighteen and

<sup>69</sup> For instance: 'Les Laotiens dans la guerre d'Indochine', 1945-1954, *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, no. 230 (2008/2), pp. 5-21.

<sup>70</sup> J.-P. Dannaud, *Guerre morte* (1954), R. Delpey, *Soldats de la boue, Vol. I: la bataille de Cochinchine* (1961) and vol. II: *la bataille du Tonkin* (1961), P. Ferrari & J. M. Vernet, *Une guerre sans fin: Indochine 1945-1954* (1984), P. Heduy, *La Guerre d'Indochine 1945-1954* (1981), A. Thévenet, *La guerre d'Indochine racontée par ceux qui l'ont vécue* (2001) and R. Delpard, *Les rizières de la souffrance: combattants français en Indochine, 1945-1954* (2004). By far the best work on soldiers in Indochina is Bernard Fall's *Street Without Joy: The French Debacle in Indochina* (1961/2005), partly based on the author's thesis at Syracuse University, *The Vietminh Regime* (1954). Fall also covered the beginning US involvement. He was killed while accompanying an American patrol. He thus suffered the same fate as photographer Robert Capa in 1954.

<sup>71</sup> D. Hémery, 'Décoloniser la France: le "syndrome indochinois"' in Blanchard & Lemaire, *Culture impériale*, 175.

<sup>72</sup> The slightly confusing title was adjusted in the second edition to *The Malayan Emergency and Indonesian Confrontation: The Commonwealth's Wars 1948-1966* (2008).

roughly sixty years. In particular they disclose educational and health standards as well as economic situations.

Chapters three and four deal with servicemen's understanding of the political context surrounding the conflicts, i.e. their causes and nature as well as the opposition faced. A full list of questions put to veterans can be found in appendix K. The main inquiries for these two chapters were: Have British and French (ex-)army personnel labelled the conflicts as local, colonial uprisings, wars for independence or as theatres of the Cold War? What were the roots of the conflicts in their eyes? Could they identify with their tasks at the time? And have they regarded their (former) enemies simply as criminal gangs, nationalist movements or communist forces?

The two chapters demonstrate that a number of issues impacted on military views. Among them figured international events before, during and after the emergencies, military and political traditions in Britain and France, personal circumstances and, not least, the outcomes of the counter-insurgency campaigns themselves. Particularly in the case of Indochina and the French Expeditionary Corps space is reserved in the section for a recounting of events during WWII, which go a long way to explain developments, takes and actions between 1945 and 1954. Chapter four also investigates to what extent French military opinions followed official and later academic compartmentalisations of the war, i.e. the transformation from an initially colonial campaign into an international conflict. In addition, ensuing 'lessons' for individual French servicemen and the army as a whole are analysed.

I also deemed it helpful to compare British and French viewpoints on conflicts and enemies with motivations and experiences of the opposition. I believe that the wide gap in perceptions between the former belligerents has justified this decision. In a way it also mirrors my comparisons throughout the thesis between military judgements of protagonists, events or settings and later academic studies of these aspects. Such contrasting highlights for instance the mistaken belief among some British veterans that Malaya had been promised independence even before WWII.

Chapters five and six explore soldierly reactions to Southeast Asia and its communities. Underlying questions include: how did impressions fit pre-conceived images, provided they existed at all? How strongly did soldiers connect with the colonial setting, particularly local populations? How have (ex-)servicemen judged the colonial record in regard to infrastructure, health and living conditions? And how intensive and lasting have imprints of Southeast Asia and its wars been on the participants?

The two parts stress that strategies employed, alliances built, personnel employed, conditions endured before and during the insurgencies as well as exposure to the British and French Empires in general (or lack thereof) impinged on views of racial groups, colonial road and rail networks, villages, towns and cities, work places and general, non-European wellbeing. Especially in this part one notes striking similarities, such as the extent or limit of imperial culture absorbed by (future) soldiers in Europe, (un-)familiarity with Southeast Asia and clear preferences for certain ethnicities.

The thesis is supplemented by several appendices. They provide details on protagonists quoted, regiments and battalions involved in the insurgencies, ranks, unit sizes and structures,

chronologies and research inquiries used in questionnaires. On the one hand their purpose lies in offering facts and figures for readers not infused with military language. On the other hand they make up to a degree for the absence of traditional military deliberations in the chapters.

How does all this fit into the wider literature on decolonisation? While enormous by now the latter has paid insufficient attention to military experiences, at least in the British case. Analyses of the process in Britain's case began to appear as early as the late 1940s,<sup>73</sup> evidently triggered by India's and Pakistan's independence. The following decades saw the appearance of related publications every now and then.<sup>74</sup> The flood gates of imperial literature really opened in the 1980s and 1990s thanks to works like John Gallagher's published Ford lectures. In them the latter debunked a few popular myths about the (end of) empire, among them the notion that "empire was [...] a continuous process of decline".<sup>75</sup> Since then John Darwin in particular has provided comprehensive surveys of the social, political and economic implications of decolonisation. He has cautioned against simplistic explanations for Britain's decolonisation. Significantly in regard to Malaya, he has held that: "Public revulsion at terrorist outrages was always prone to be balanced by irritation at the inability of the security forces to defeat terrorist movements, and eventually by a feeling that the loss of (British) life was not justified by the purpose supposedly served by a military presence."<sup>76</sup> Here then lies one rationalisation for Britain's determination to hand over power in Malaya rather sooner than later.

In the last couple of years a flurry of further overviews has followed. Authors include Lawrence Butler, Ronald Hyam and Andrew Stewart.<sup>77</sup> The latter has highlighted the paradox in the intensive cooperation between Britain and her dominions during WWII that nevertheless led to maturity and emancipation on the part of the latter. One could add to this that these developments did not prevent Australia and New Zealand from playing an active part in the Malayan Emergency.

Other writers have focused on specific fields and areas within the discipline. (In the latter case I have earlier limited the discussion to Malaya.) Frank Henlein studied the political decisions governing the British decolonisation process as a whole.<sup>78</sup> Nicholas White has analysed the economic disentangling in Malaya. He has thereby pointed out that the territory's importance as a dollar earner waned in the mid-1950s.<sup>79</sup> (This argument offers another important reason for the territory's independence in 1957, despite the continuing emergency.) Susan Carruthers and John McKenzie have shed light on governmental spins in the portrayal of the violent clashes accompanying Britain's expansion and retreat, not least in Malaya.<sup>80</sup> John Stuart has depicted

<sup>73</sup> R. Hinden, *Empire and After: A Study of British Imperial Attitudes* (1949).

<sup>74</sup> Among them: W.P. Kirkman's *Unscrambling an Empire: A Critique of British Colonial Policy, 1956-1966* (1966).

<sup>75</sup> J. Gallagher (ed. by Anil Seal), *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire: The Ford Lectures and Other Essays* (1982), p. 152.

<sup>76</sup> J. Darwin, *The End of the British Empire: The Historical Debate* (1991), p. 21. See also his earlier work *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat from Empire in the Post-War World* (1988).

<sup>77</sup> L. J. Butler, *Britain and Empire: Adjusting to a Post-Imperial World* (2001/2), R. Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation, 1918-1968* (2006) and A. Stewart, *Empire Lost: Britain, the Dominions and the Second World War* (2008).

<sup>78</sup> F. Henlein, *British Government Policy and Decolonisation, 1945-1963: Scrutinising the Official Mind* (2002).

<sup>79</sup> N. J. White, *Business, Government and the End of Empire: Malaya, 1942-1957* (1996), pp. 278-9.

<sup>80</sup> MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire* and S. L. Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds: British Governments, the Media, and Colonial Counter-Insurgency* (1995).

the uneasy relationship between missions, the colonial administration and African nationalism.<sup>81</sup> Missions played a much greater role in Indochina than in Malaya due to Islam's dominance in the latter territory. It explains the scarcity of books on the subject.

Ronald Hyam, Roger Louis and Steven Howe have made the connection between British party politics and decolonisation.<sup>82</sup> These works have shattered any simplistic equation featuring a 'progressive left' and an 'intransigent right' when it comes to decolonisation.<sup>83</sup> Influential prime ministers, colonial secretaries and administrators have also been the subject of studies. The authors to mention in this context are Philip Murphy, Philip Ziegler, Richard Aldous, Sabine Lee and Anthony Kirk-Greene.<sup>84</sup> Murphy's biography is insomuch of importance as Lennox-Boyd served during the second half of the emergency. To some extent he has been overshadowed in the historiography by his predecessor Oliver Lyttelton, who oversaw the more crucial years.

The frequent violence accompanying the painful political separations in the empire has triggered controversial books and articles by David Anderson, Caroline Elkins, Huw Bennett, Daniel Branch and Brian Simpson.<sup>85</sup> These publications contain passages on the military's (misconduct) but are not necessarily based on soldiers' accounts. Anderson's book for instance focuses on proceedings in Nairobi's courtrooms that all too often resulted in hanging for those suspected of involvement in the Mau Mau rebellion. That said, he also included passages on the military confrontations in Kenya's highland jungles and Kikuyu reservation.

As regards French decolonisation, a small but steady trickle of publications over the decades turned into a considerable flow in the 1990s – but probably not one quite as extensive as in Britain. One of the first surveys was published by Henri Grimal shortly after the end of the Algerian War.<sup>86</sup> It took a relatively long time until further surveys appeared. Especially Charles-Robert Ageron kick-started the next round thereby establishing himself as a leading authority on empire and decolonisation. It is striking that he, his co-writers and other French scholars<sup>87</sup> have referred to public opinion polls as well as to attitudes of the media, unions and the church to prove the limited French interest in the (end of the) colonial empire.<sup>88</sup> Equally noteworthy is the fact that France's

<sup>81</sup> J. Stuart, *Race, Politics and Evangelisation: British Protestant Missionaries and African Colonial Affairs, 1940-63* (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London, 2004).

<sup>82</sup> R. Hyam & W.M. R. Louis (ed.), *The Conservative Governments and the End of Empire 1957-1964* (BDEE, series A, 2000) and S. Howe, *Anti-colonialism in British Politics: The Left and the End of Empire 1939-1964* (1993).

<sup>83</sup> An earlier contributor, Philip Murphy, has maintained that: "... the debate over Africa in the Conservative party was strongly influenced by prevailing economic trends, and that the party [...] played a significant role in the bargains which transformed those shifting economic realities into political power." See *Party Politics And Decolonization: The Conservative Party and British Colonial Policy in Tropical Africa, 1951-1964* (1995), p. 240.

<sup>84</sup> P. Murphy, *Alan Lennox-Boyd: A Biography* (1999), P. Ziegler, *Mountbatten: The Official Biography* (2001), R. Aldous & S. Lee (eds.), *Harold MacMillan and Britain's World Role* (1996) and A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *Britain's Imperial Administrators, 1858-1966* (2000).

<sup>85</sup> Huw Bennett handed in a thesis at the University of Wales at Aberystwyth in 2007 titled *British Counterinsurgency and the Use of Force in Kenya, 1952-1956*. He has also published an article with David Anderson and Daniel Branch on military misconduct during the Mau Mau revolt titled 'A Very British Massacre', *History Today*, 56, 8, 2006, pp. 20-22. His latest contribution is "A Very Salutary Effect". The Counter-Terror Strategy in the Early Malayan Emergency, June 1948 to December 1949', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 32, issue 3, June 2009, pp. 415-444. Simpson's *Human Rights and the End of Empire* (2004) is a more general and legal approach.

<sup>86</sup> H. Grimal, *La décolonisation 1919-1963* (1965).

<sup>87</sup> See passages on decolonisation and imperial culture in chapters 4 and 6.

<sup>88</sup> J. Thobie, G. Meynier, C. Coquery-Vidrovitch & Ch.-R. Ageron, *Histoire de la France coloniale 1914-1990* (1990), pp. 377-82, 411-22 and 437-47. Earlier, Ageron provided an analysis of decolonisation in *Les chemins de la décolonisation de l'empire française, 1936-1956* (1986).

dramatic (colonial) history has exerted a strong pull on many British and American academics, among them Raymond Betts.<sup>89</sup>

In parallel, more specific works on individual groups, personalities, institutions and regions (see earlier discussion on Indochina) embroiled in and affected by decolonisation have sprung up. Noteworthy publications comprise Paul Sorum's *Intellectuals and Decolonization in France* (1977), which has outlined the difficulty of journalists, editors and academics to come to grips with growing nationalism in the colonies.<sup>90</sup> Two other important contributions are Jacques Marseille's *Empire colonial et capitalisme français: histoire d'un divorce* (1984) and Olivier Colombani's *Mémoires coloniales: la fin de l'empire français d'Afrique vue par les administrateurs coloniaux* (1991). The latter has highlighted parallels to the experiences of French commanders in the Indochina War, i.e. the scarcity and late arrival of resources for the control of immense territories. Despite its title, it features passages on (military) administrators in Indochina.

After a longer pause Nicolas Bancel, Daniel Denis and Youssef Fates introduced a study of youth movements in the colonial context.<sup>91</sup> One could argue that the portraits of all these groups equaled for some time a French approach more rooted in social history than a British one emphasising political history. Although the scope has opened up in Britain Roger Louis' and Ronald Robinson's classic article on US-British relations during decolonisation constituted a fairly representative angle until recently.<sup>92</sup> (That said, Louis is American.)

Above-mentioned suspension of works on decolonization, if one can call it that, might have something to do with the re-emergence of the Algerian War as a heated topic during the late 1990s. It also explains why, in comparison, decolonisation in Indochina and other parts of the French Empire have taken a backseat. Owing to the involvement of large numbers of French conscripts it was some of the more critical and vocal soldiers, who initially drove the recollection of the 'war without a name'.<sup>93</sup> Following the end of the war the ensuing silence was occasionally interrupted by controversial publications and films.<sup>94</sup> It definitely ended when the French parliament officially recognised the conflict as a war in June 1999. One year later former insurgent Louisette Ighilahriz described in *Le Monde* how she had been tortured by the French military in 1957 – a claim rejected by General Bigeard but indirectly accepted by General Massu. In October 2000 twelve former French militants called on the government to recognise and condemn the atrocities committed, some of which General Aussaresses freely described in his memoirs.<sup>95</sup> In November *Le Monde* published long interviews with the latter and Massu.<sup>96</sup> These public debates eventually resonated with the likes of Benjamin Stora, Jean-Charles Chauffret, Raphaëlle

<sup>89</sup> R. F. Betts, *France and Decolonization, 1900-1960* (1991).

<sup>90</sup> P. 241.

<sup>91</sup> N. Bancel, D. Denis and Y. Fates, *De l'Indochine à l'Algérie: la jeunesse en mouvements des deux côtés du miroir colonial, 1940-1962* (2003).

<sup>92</sup> W.M. R. Louis & R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Decolonization', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 22, no. 3 (August 1994), pp. 462-511.

<sup>93</sup> Perhaps the best known is J. J. Servan-Schreiber's *Lieutenant en Algérie* (1957).

<sup>94</sup> Examples are G. Pontecorvo's *La bataille d'Alger* (1966), J.-P. Vittori's book *Nous, les appelés d'Algérie* (1977) and A. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954-62* (1977).

<sup>95</sup> P. Aussaresses, *Services spéciaux, Algérie 1955-1957* (2001). Massu and Aussaresses played crucial roles during the war, not least during the 'Battle of Algiers'.

<sup>96</sup> Events from 1999 to 2001 can be traced on [www.aidh.org](http://www.aidh.org).

Branche and Sylvie Thénault in France and with Martin Alexander and Martin Evans in Britain.<sup>97</sup> Branche has been particularly prominent due to her chilling depiction of the increasingly institutionalised system and spread of torture. There are also references to such practices in Indochina, which brings us back to this thesis.

The progression from political categorisations (chapters three and four) to impressions of territories and populations (chapters five and six) makes sense if one considers that the British and French authorities devolved power to Asians during the conflicts. They did so in order to counter nationalist arguments of imperial suppression. Instead of focusing on pacification military and political efforts thus turned towards re-establishing peace and stability for eventual self-government. Officially European servicemen no longer fought for western control but for vaguely defined cultural and economic links within a newer framework. This could have begged the question for the men on the spot of whether these areas and peoples merited their sacrifice. As chapters four and six demonstrate, such questions loomed much larger in French than in British military minds.

The term 'imperial culture' has surfaced several times. The thesis sections also attempt to measure the extent of the latter in Britain and France prior to soldiers' involvement in the wars. Furthermore, perceptions of Southeast Asian political affairs, society, gender and infrastructure in particular also require to some extent metropolitan reference points. Experiences at home inevitably shaped military judgments. Such references have found their way into several chapters.

If chapters five and six explore the degree of soldiers' imperial 'infusion', they do so against the background of an ongoing, and often heated, academic debate on both sides of the channel. At times it has included discussions on the impact of decolonisation. Before the advent of this discipline, the assumption prevailed in Britain that empire had left the British masses relatively cold and that they had accepted decolonisation without much grumbling. As John Darwin stated as late as 1991: "... British opinion at home was simply not interested in it [empire], knew little or nothing about it, and was, consequently, quite unwilling to see scarce resources spent on preserving it."<sup>98</sup> Such notions have been challenged by many scholars, beginning with John MacKenzie in 1986. The latter edited essays highlighting the (apparently) strong and influential imperial bearing of vehicles, such as the BBC, the Empire Marketing Board, paintings and children's books between 1870 and 1950.<sup>99</sup> Fourteen years later Cathrine Hall inquired how travellers, missionaries or colonial officials turned into colonisers and how "colonialism was lived domestically".<sup>100</sup> Stuart Ward embraced similar aspects albeit focusing on the end of empire. He and his colleagues scrutinised popular appreciations of imperial decline as (potentially) witnessed

<sup>97</sup> A few of many titles are B. Stora, *Histoire de la guerre d'Algérie (1954-1962)* (1993) and *Le gangrène et l'oubli: la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (2005), J.-Ch. Jauffret, *Soldats en Algérie, 1954-1962: expériences contrastées des hommes du contingent* (2004) and (dir.) *Des hommes et des femmes en guerre d'Algérie* (2003), R. Branche, *La torture et l'armée pendant la guerre d'Algérie, 1954-1962* (2001) and *La guerre d'Algérie: une histoire apaisée?* (2005) as well as S. Thénault, *Une drôle de justice: les magistrats dans la guerre d'Algérie* (2001). In addition to previously mentioned titles Alexander and Evans collaborated with J.F.V. Keiger on *The Algerian War and the French Army, 1954-62: Experiences, Images, Testimonies* (2002).

<sup>98</sup> Darwin, *The End of Empire*, 13.

<sup>99</sup> J. M. MacKenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (1986).

<sup>100</sup> C. Hall, *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Reader* (2000), p. 16. Together with Sonja Rose she further developed these questions in *At Home With Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (2006).

through arts, sports, transport, immigration and singular events like the Everest expedition. Ward, like his colleagues, has questioned the 'minimal impact thesis', calling instead for a more nuanced approach.<sup>101</sup>

Building on his earlier work, Andrew Thompson has struck a careful note but has acknowledged the subtle impact of empire. He has stressed that the colonial realm impacted differently on the various sections of British society, which in turn responded in differing ways.<sup>102</sup> Wendy Webster (and her contributors) has addressed comparable questions, spotlighting crucial developments and events such as WWII or the Queen's coronation. While insisting that the loss of empire resonated in British society she has admitted that the extent is difficult to measure.<sup>103</sup>

Given their own nationalities, Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich have contested the Britain-centred approach of existing literature, calling instead for an examination of the British Empire as "a phenomenon of migration and mass settlement". In their view these aspects were "key element[s] in the development of "Britishness".<sup>104</sup> Phillip Buckner and Douglas Francis added weight to this argument with an analogous collection. Despite putting a question mark behind the concept of a British World, they too, have held that the empire was central to it – and with it the dominions.<sup>105</sup>

Martin Lynn then added a volume centring on the crucial and distinct 1950s. Although colonies were gaining independence during that period Lynn has argued that these years also demonstrated the importance of the imperial economy to Britain. Partly as a result, especially the Tories attempted to maintain a world role for Britain.<sup>106</sup> Bernard Porter has offered a more sceptical view. He has maintained that allegedly imperial aspects and discourses of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century British society had more to do with domestic or universal issues at the time.<sup>107</sup>

In France, early works, like Henri Brunschwig's *Mythes et réalités de l'impérialisme colonial français, 1871-1914* (1961), suggest that imperial culture occupied French academic minds early on. Even so, Amanda Sackur and Tony Chafer have noted the influence of John McKenzie on French scholarship.<sup>108</sup> Generally, British and French schools of thought have developed along similar lines. Early French historians of empire, too, have held that colonies were the business of a small but fairly active elite. One of the earliest advocates of this theory was Raoul Girardet, who analysed the role of imperialism in France and the various debates. Some of these centred on the pros and contras of assimilation or association.<sup>109</sup> He has noted the importance of empire

<sup>101</sup> S. Ward (ed.), *British Culture and the End of Empire* (2001), pp. 1-20.

<sup>102</sup> A. S. Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (2005), pp. 239-44.

<sup>103</sup> W. Webster (ed.), *Englishness and Empire, 1939-95* (2005), pp. 1-18.

<sup>104</sup> C. Bridge & K. Fedorowich (eds.), *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity* (2003), p. 3.

<sup>105</sup> P. Buckner & R. D. Francis (eds.), *Rediscovering the British World* (2005), pp. 9-20.

<sup>106</sup> M. Lynn (ed.), *The British Empire in the 1950s: Retreat or Revival?* (2006), pp. 1-11.

<sup>107</sup> B. Porter, *The Absent-minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (2004), pp. 306-21. It should be kept in mind though that Porter has focused on the nineteenth century.

<sup>108</sup> Chafer & Sackur (ed.), *Promoting the Colonial Idea*, 3. In this context one should also take note of T. G. August's earlier *The Selling of Empire: British and French Imperialist Propaganda, 1890-1940* (1985).

<sup>109</sup> Assimilation would have aimed to replicate the French administrative, fiscal and judicial structures in the colonies and to bestow on its subjects the same rights and duties as on metropolitan citizens. Association would have resulted in less strict adjustments and slower *francisation*. See R. Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (1996), p. 110.

during WWII and the heated debates surrounding the Algerian War. But he has also sensed a rapid closure after the French withdrawal and a lack of an imperial hangover in the metropolis.<sup>110</sup>

Not much after afore-mentioned Paul Sorum coined the term “passively imperialist” when referring to the French populace. He has attributed this to the fact that (colonial) politics was habitually discussed and shaped by a small circle of politicians and intellectuals, to whom voters had delegated responsibility.<sup>111</sup> Stuart Persell followed a similar line emphasising the smallness but dedication of the colonial lobby.<sup>112</sup> Charles-Robert Ageron and his co-editors have supported this thesis, citing, among other things, the limited commercial exchange with the colonies. They have also dubbed the apparent imperial consensus during the Colonial Exhibition of 1931 a “legend”.<sup>113</sup>

These traditional concepts have been contested in recent years in France and in Britain. Abdelkebir Khatibi, Catherine Hodeir and Michel Pierre were among the first to do so.<sup>114</sup> After a longer pause Tony Chafer, Amanda Sackur and others combined intriguing articles examining the imperial traces in education and propaganda. The editors have emphasised the “integrative and unifying role” of empire even after the expansionary rush. But they have equally acknowledged that this did not necessarily result in great familiarity with or passion for the colonies. Instead, the latter: “...fostered a particular sense of French identity based on ‘grandeur’ and ‘racism’”. It made it easier to swallow the 1871 defeat against Germany but the final divorce from empire very painful. Far from advocating an immense cultural impact of empire though, the editors have held that popular culture has to be taken into account in order to grasp the metropolitan echo of colonialism and decolonisation.<sup>115</sup>

Across the channel, Pascal Blanchard has driven the study of imperial culture, insisting on a strong impact of empire on France. The first of two edited volumes, covering the period of expansion, features several essays on such aspects as science or the *Agence générale des colonies*. Despite his views on imperial culture, Blanchard and his co-editor, Sandrine Lemaire, have admitted that not all external influences in France were necessarily imperial. Equally, they have reminded us that imperial culture did not least serve to provide moral guidelines for France itself, while legitimising the changing regimes. Their second volume covers the years until (oddly) 1961 and ventures into such differing topics as food or the Vichy regime. In its introduction, the editors have maintained that the imperial influences and links became even stronger after the 1930s and helped to unify the nation.<sup>116</sup>

Martin Evans has shown more caution. His introduction provides a helpful overview over imperial expansion, contraction and lasting influences. Contrary to others, he has traced colonial

<sup>110</sup> R. Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962* (1972), pp. 194-201 and 258-285.

<sup>111</sup> Sorum, *Intellectuals and Decolonization in France*, 5-12.

<sup>112</sup> S. M. Persell, *The French Colonial Lobby, 1889-1938* (1983), pp. 1-6.

<sup>113</sup> Thobie, Meynier, Cocquery-Vidrovitch & Ageron, *Histoire de la France Coloniale*, 564-70.

<sup>114</sup> A. Khatibi, *Figures de l'étranger dans la littérature française* (1987) and C. Hodeir & M. Pierre, *L'exposition coloniale* (1993).

<sup>115</sup> Chafer & Sackur, *Promoting the Colonial Idea*, 6 and 9.

<sup>116</sup> P. Blanchard & S. Lemaire, *Culture coloniale: la France conquise par son empire, 1870-1931* (2003), pp. 5-39 and *Culture Impériale: les colonies au cœur de la République, 1931-1961* (2004), pp. 5-31. Blanchard's latest edited publication is simply titled *La France coloniale* (2008). One of his contributors is Robert Aldrich who published his own book, *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France: Monuments, Museums and Colonial Memories*, in 2005.



influences in Napoleon's expedition to Egypt as well as in the travels and resulting art of French painters.<sup>117</sup> It seems as if such caution has turned into a general weariness, resulting in a somewhat declining interest in imperial culture. Or perhaps discussions have simply shifted to related topics like post-colonialism and immigration. Unsurprisingly, it has often been descendents of immigrants who have engaged in such deliberations.<sup>118</sup>

Thesis chapters five and six also connect with the burgeoning literature regarding European views of the 'exotic other' or 'orientalism', which was so thoroughly dissected by Edward Said.<sup>119</sup> The latter mainly cited writers, philosophers and colonial administrators when exposing the inherent racism in western observations of eastern customs. In some ways Frederick Cooper's and Ann Stoler's edited volume is more comprehensive in that it entails debates on missions, motherhood, citizenship, architecture, education and labour. The unifying subject in their work is the "imaginary and physical space in which the inclusions and exclusions built into the notions of citizenship, sovereignty, and participation were worked out". In discussing these spaces the authors have argued "for careful interrogation of the relationship of colonial state to metropolitan state".<sup>120</sup>

Having outlined content and structure of the thesis, as well as the relevant historiography, a word needs to be said in regard to the project's boundaries and the terminology employed. The focus of this study lies on male, British and French (former) army personnel. That said, voices from the navies, air forces, the police, expatriate communities and (former) enemies have also been considered. I have attempted to include testimonies of as many ranks, units and social origins as possible. Likewise, I have tried to pay equal attention to regular and conscript soldiers. For reasons explained in chapter two, this was possible only in the British case.

The period covered is evident from the title but some testimonials also cover earlier and later years. This owes to the fact that British troops re-entered Malaya as early as September 1945, with some staying until and beyond the day the emergency was declared. Vice versa, some of the protagonists (and their units) quoted here remained in Malaya after 1960 because their tasks demanded it. The case was similar in Indochina.

The area concerned also requires clarification for readers unfamiliar with its history. The administrative realm of British Malaya during the emergency covered the peninsula, stretching down from the Thai border to the Straits of Malacca. It did not include Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak. French Indochina on the other hand comprised Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. While the war concerned all three territories Vietnam saw the bulk of clashes. As a result, the majority of testimonies have come from servicemen fighting in the largest and most populous territory.

Last but not least, I have omitted accents in Southeast Asian words for the sake of simplicity.

<sup>117</sup> M. Evans (ed.), *Empire and Culture: The French Experience, 1830–1940* (2004), pp. 1-23.

<sup>118</sup> One of the multiple, recent contributions is A. Hajjat's *Immigration postcoloniale et mémoire* (2005).

<sup>119</sup> The book of the same title was first published in 1978.

<sup>120</sup> F. Cooper & A. L. Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (1997), pp. 1, 3 and 4.

## Primary sources employed

This research project has relied to a considerable degree on testimonies of British and French servicemen. These have taken the form of interviews, questionnaires, memoirs (published and unpublished), private collections, and reminiscences on veterans' sites. Radio and TV documentaries, newspaper articles, various military journals (past and contemporary), handbooks, ministerial and parliamentary papers as well as photographs have complemented them. This diversity offers insights from various angles and helps to avoid oversimplifications or partisanship. This is especially important as oral history looms large in this thesis.

The discipline owes its birth to Allan Nevins, a historian at Columbia University. His speciality lay in diplomatic history which required many interviews. Nevins' approach was boosted by the rise of the civil rights and feminist movements, whose protagonists were interviewed with newly available and cheap tape recorders. One of the most important works in this regard is *Autobiography of Malcom X*. While the new devices allowed to record the voices of society's margins, traditionalists questioned the accuracy of the findings. To accommodate the critics, the interviewers discarded any statements made by allegedly forgetful or distrustful interviewees. It was only when Italian Alessandro Portelli and others accepted and interpreted the inaccuracies in the discussions that the discipline gained more acceptance. Interestingly but not surprisingly, the breakthrough occurred in Italy, which was deeply divided between communist and neo-fascist factions throughout the second half of the 20th century. Portelli was used to take ideologies into consideration when reading newspaper articles, archival sources or books.<sup>121</sup>

He has to some extent been overshadowed by compatriot Luisa Passerini, who added new features to oral history. Concentrating first on the experiences of the Turin working classes in the 1930s and 1940s<sup>122</sup> she moved to the events of 1968. Her *Autobiography of a Generation: Italy 1968*<sup>123</sup> combines elements of her own psychoanalysis years after the momentous year, her life up to those sessions, including her involvement in the events of 1968, and interviews with student activists of the time. In so doing she, like other oral historians, "... explore[d] the ways in which the relationship between private and public, personal and political is negotiated."<sup>124</sup> In Passerini's case a feminist undercurrent has flown into these analyses.

While an increasing number of historians have used oral history the latter has struggled to shake off its seemingly unscientific nature. As Ronald Grele has pointed out, oral historians themselves have habitually been very excited about the discipline in public while guarding reservations in private. As a result, the discipline has been pushed into archives and libraries. Indeed, it is probably no coincidence that staff at the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London or the *Bureau des témoignages oraux* (part of the *Service historique de la défense* (SHD)) in Paris

<sup>121</sup> Alexander Stille, 'Prospecting for Truth Amid the Distortions of Oral History', *The New York Times*, March 10, 2001. The article is part of a package distributed by Dr. Michael Kandiah for a course titled 'Interviewing Techniques'. It was held at the Centre for Contemporary British History (London) on June 8, 2006.

<sup>122</sup> *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (1987) (translated by R. Lumley & J. Bloomfield).

<sup>123</sup> Published in Italy in 1988 and in the US/Britain in 1996.

<sup>124</sup> Foreword by J. Wallach Scott in above publication, xii.

have conducted a considerable number of interviews with war veterans, many of which still await academic scrutiny. The hesitation is not entirely logical, as Portelli has highlighted:

... written and oral sources are not mutually exclusive. They have common as well as autonomous characteristics, and specific functions which only either one can fill [...] Very often, written documents are only the uncontrolled transmission of unidentified oral sources [...] The passage from these oral *ur*-sources to the written document is often the result of processes which have no scientific credibility and are frequently heavy with class bias. [...] This applies to parliamentary records, minutes of meetings and conventions, and interviews reported in newspapers: all sources which are legitimately and widely used in standard historical research.

Some oral historians have exacerbated the scepticism by simply asking time witnesses about specific events, instead of verifying the facts beforehand. In addition, they have often underestimated the complexity of interviews. Portelli has pointed out that the historian is always part of the source. He or she draws up the questions, selects the interviewees and writes the transcript, thereby considerably shaping and possibly tainting the final result. During transcription the interviewer might not always correctly interpret the true meaning of intonation, rhythm, pauses or dwelling on certain events. Apart from that, memory can fail the interviewee<sup>125</sup> – especially if he is as old as the veterans considered for this project. Some of them have warned themselves that they might not remember everything, despite not particularly struggling in the ensuing sessions.

There are other issues to consider: Luisa Passerini has noted that oral testimonies have a tendency to veil tragic aspects and intense sentiments.<sup>126</sup> Portelli for his part found that witnesses placed the death of a worker, named Luigi Trastulli, into the context of mass firings in 1953, instead of demonstrations against Italy's decision to join NATO in 1949.<sup>127</sup> He concluded:

Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did. [...] The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire emerge. Therefore, there are no 'false' oral sources. Once we have checked their factual credibility [...] the diversity of oral history consists in the fact that 'wrong' statements are still psychologically 'true' and that this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts. [...] But what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings. Thus, the specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies, not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Both paragraphs based on Ronald J. Grele, 'Movement Without Aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History' and A. Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different', *The Oral History Reader*, 38-49 and 64-73 (quote on p. 44).

<sup>126</sup> Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory*, 21.

<sup>127</sup> Stille in the *The New York Times*, 3.10.2001.

<sup>128</sup> Portelli in Perks & Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, 67, 68 and 69.

Oral historians must also take into account interviewees' backgrounds and circumstances. A former National Serviceman of humble origins, who left Britain against his will while his family lost a bread-winner for two years, might have looked back on his tour in Malaya with a degree of resentment. This is even more likely if he lost close friends on patrol or was himself seriously injured. Vice versa, a young, adventurous, ambitious and outdoor-loving regular officer, whose father and grandfather had already served in the army, could have guarded very fond memories of his spell. Equally, a French private, seeking to escape war-torn France after WWII, arrived in Indochina with a distinctly different outlook than a professional officer, who had spent all his life abroad.

Despite these deliberations, oral history makes particular sense for this project because it has allowed the inclusion of voices from the military and the lower classes – both of which have taken a backseat in (imperial) history. However, other researchers asked the questions in archival interviews, not all of them relevant for this project. Especially at the IWM technical inquiries outnumber those on social and cultural aspects. In contrast, BTO staff have habitually left much scope and initiative to the interviewees – with often fascinating results.

To complement oral testimonies I conducted my own interviews in Britain. I also sent out hundreds of questionnaires to branches of the NMBVA and the ANAI. While this latter approach proved efficient, it entailed certain disadvantages. To begin with, the limited space provided and the bureaucratic appearance resulted in sometimes very short and vague answers. In many cases potential participants were simply discouraged to fill out the questionnaires. This was due to, as one British veteran put it, a traditional abhorrence of forms dating back to their military tours. Whatever the reasons, some forms were returned empty. The questionnaires also highlight again the need to be conscious of circumstances. While British National Servicemen at times had made up the bulk of units in Malaya, the majority of respondents were former regulars, among them many NCOs.

As regards specific answers, a few British veterans seem to have felt irritated, thus producing slightly moody replies. Others indicated in their replies that they would have preferred to elaborate on the British effort in Malaya, individual operations and friendships. One former serviceman inserted detailed answers into the form but followed up with a letter. In it he offered his take on the political and military aspects of the emergency.<sup>129</sup> In a few cases I sensed a general uneasiness with my research approach and academia in general that proved difficult to pin down. But I also discerned an eagerness by many respondents to get the story out during follow-up calls, as well as a gratefulness that someone showed interest. Several non-associated veterans contacted me after learning about my research through colleagues.

The process was more delicate in France where my initial mailing produced only polite but evasive replies. Addressed branch secretaries referred to the president, General Simon. Initially unhappy with the questions in the forms, the latter nevertheless offered his opinions on the war after I explained my research in more detail.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Filled out and written on July 5, 2007. The individual preferred not to be named.  
<sup>130</sup> Letters dated 14.10 and 28.11.2008.

The third source heavily used for this project are memoirs. Their benefit lies in the ability of the authors to choose the content, which reveals much about their take on history. Some authors have clearly aimed to highlight or defend the efforts and decisions of certain groups and individuals (i.e. theirs or those of certain units) or to correct the official story of the conflicts.<sup>131</sup> Like interviews, military memoirs have largely been ignored by academia if one believes John Newsinger. The latter has also held that such discarding is unfortunate as:

This literature is particularly important because of the way in which it demonstrates that militarism and imperialism are central aspects of British national culture and not peripheral concerns [...] The memoirs of the [...] Emergency [...] tell the story of colonial warfare waged by young white men in an exotic locale against an alien foe: the very stuff of the imperial imagination.<sup>132</sup>

Biographies have suffered a similar fate according to Graham Dawson. He has bemoaned the “relative neglect of biography in cultural studies [especially] in studies of the narratives of Victorian imperialism”.<sup>133</sup> Dawson knew what he was complaining about, having studied the careers of and myths surrounding Scott Waverly, Henry Havelock and T. E. Lawrence.

The neglect is unfortunate as the emergency has generated a considerable number of published, personal accounts. A first wave saw the light during the campaign and immediately after. Among them are Arthur Campbell's *Jungle Green* (1953), Mark Henniker's, *Red Shadow Over Malaya* (1955), Oliver Crawford's *The Door Marked Malaya* (1958) and Richard Mier's *Shoot to Kill* (1959). The martial titles can be confusing. Miers' memoirs for instance contain critical and sensitive observations not only of military but also political, social and economic aspects in Malaya.

With the escalation of the Vietnam War, former senior military figures felt compelled to advise Americans on the do's and don'ts of counter-insurgency. Two of them were Sir Robert Thompson<sup>134</sup> and Richard Clutterbuck.<sup>135</sup> In comparison, the later 1970s remained rather quiet if one ignores the more general works of another participant, the later General Sir Frank Kitson.<sup>136</sup> But since the 1980s there has been a steady trickle of memoirs, intensifying in the last couple of years. The latest work is John Chynoweth's *Hunting Terrorists in the Jungle* (2004/7). The fact that the author died before publication explains the recent burst and the growing activities on the internet. Many veterans want to get their story out before they die.

It is interesting that the early authors were often company and battalion commanders while the more recent authors tended to serve as National Servicemen. Among them have featured two or

<sup>131</sup> See for instance: H. Andrew's *Who Won the Malayan Emergency?* (1995), which emphasises the role of the police and H. Navarre's *Agonie de l'Indochine* (1953-1954) (1956), which constitutes a defence of the author's term as commander-in-chief.

<sup>132</sup> J. Newsinger, 'The Military Memoir in British Imperial Culture: The Case of Malaya', *Race & Class*, 1994, 35, 47, p. 48.

<sup>133</sup> G. Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (1994), p. 7

<sup>134</sup> R. Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam* (1966).

<sup>135</sup> R. L. Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War: The Emergency in Malaya, 1948-1960* (1967).

<sup>136</sup> Kitson also served in Kenya which explains his *Gangs and Counter-gangs* (1960). His other books include *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peacekeeping* (1971) and *Bunch of Five* (1977).

three subalterns.<sup>137</sup> On the other hand, former commanders-in-chief have remained silent – in marked contrast to their French counterparts. In two cases biographies filled the gap.<sup>138</sup> One can muse about the silence among the highest ranks. Perhaps generals felt bound by an unofficial apolitical tradition. It was General Sir Walter Walker who broke with this custom in 1997,<sup>139</sup> encouraging some successors to do the same.<sup>140</sup>

In France, senior commanders have been at the forefront of printed remembrance. Previously mentioned Generals Aussaresses, Bigeard, Massu and Navarre as well as Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu, Generals de la Bollardi re and Ely all produced their memoirs. General Salan even wrote several volumes.<sup>141</sup> While these held senior ranks, other veterans-turned writers served in more junior roles in the 1940s and 1950s. That applies to H lie de Saint Marc, who has become a self-styled representative of veterans of the wars in Indochina and Algeria.<sup>142</sup> One could argue that this has produced a slightly one-sided and elitist picture of the French effort in Indochina. Yet, as will be demonstrated, a considerable number of French participants were indeed officers and NCOs. One of the most ordinary figures at the time was the later actor Alain Delon, then a marine. He was one of several veterans, who would later make their mark in French arts and entertainment. Together with Pierre Schoendoerffer, Jean Lacouture and Jules Roy, these protagonists have turned the memory of the war into a sort of celebrity affair. If one adds controversial figures like the later leader of the *Front National*, Jean-Marie Le Pen, a picture emerges of a special group of soldiers shaped by unusual circumstances, i.e. WWII, resistance and the traumas of Indochina and Algeria.

However, one could argue that these men and their outlooks were not necessarily representative of French servicemen over the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Pierre Miquel has held that it was largely inconceivable by the turn of the century that an officer publicly expressed his opinion on governmental decisions. Those who ignored the rule often did so under pseudonyms in specific journals.<sup>143</sup> Thus resulted the army's nickname, *la grande muette*.<sup>144</sup> It should also be borne in mind that many Indochinese veterans later served in Algeria. If they wrote memoirs, they were frequently recounted through the North African prism. By citing the trauma of abandoning loyal Indochinese communities, as de Saint Marc did, they have explained their involvement in the 1961 putsch.

Generally, one should be aware that there are underlying factors to memoirs and other recollections, which are difficult to measure. Are the varying British and French testimonies due

<sup>137</sup> A subaltern is a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant. A very readable and typically comical example of works by lower ranked servicemen is L. S. Ives, *A Musketeer For the King: The Trials and Tribulations of a National Serviceman, 1949-51* (1999).

<sup>138</sup> J. Cloake, *Templer: Tiger of Malaya: The Life of Field-Marshal Sir Gerald Templer* (1985) and J. P. Riley, *The Life & Campaigns of General Hughie Stockwell: From Norway, through Burma to Suez* (2006).

<sup>139</sup> W. Walker, *Fighting On* (1997).

<sup>140</sup> See for instance: General Sir Mike Jackson, *Soldier: The Autobiography* (2007).

<sup>141</sup> P. Aussaresses, *Pour la France: services sp ciaux (1942-1954)* (2001), M. Bigeard, *Ma guerre d'Indochine*, J. Massu, *Sept ans avec Leclerc* (1974), T. D'Argenlieu, *Chroniques d'Indochine 1945-1947* (1985), J. P ris de Bollardi re, *Bataille d'Alger, bataille de l'homme* (1972) and P. Ely, *M moires, I: l'Indochine dans la tourmente* (1964). Among Salan's memoirs the two following deal with Indochina: *M moires: Fin d'un empire; "Le sens d'un engagement", juin 1899-septembre 1946* (1970) and *M moires: Fin d'un empire. "Le Viet-minh mon adversaire", octobre 1946-octobre 1954* (1971).

<sup>142</sup> H. de Saint Marc (with L. Beccaria), *M moires: les champs de braises* (1995).

<sup>143</sup> P. Miquel, *L'arm e fran aise 1880-1930: un certain  ge d'or* (1987), p. 55-6.

<sup>144</sup> 'The great mute'.

to actual, contrasting experiences, national characteristics or what could be termed as 'testimonial traditions'? Early memoirs have undoubtedly set the tone for succeeding ones. Veterans' meetings have further shaped the way the conflicts and areas have been remembered. The jokes and technical elaborations I overheard during British reunions for instance can be found in the earliest witness accounts. On the other hand, one can discern a French pattern of accusations and counter-accusations, paired with an expressed fondness for Indochina and its people. It could well be that individuals in either military camp have felt differently from the bulk but have hesitated to express their alternative views.

Perhaps as a result, some memoirs never made it into print. They have, together with letters, reports and photographs, remained in private collections. Their content has evidently been filtered by the person submitting the records and sometimes again by archival staff. But it has usually not been edited or censored, which makes them highly original and often rich sources.

The story is slightly different in the case of articles in regimental journals. In Britain, the latter are habitually stored in regimental museums. The texts tend to feature reports on kills and almost-kills, sporting events and mess activities – all accompanied by jokes.<sup>145</sup> Reading them one could easily get the impression that it was all great fun. Despite that, such texts offer useful insights into army life, conditions, traditions and values. The same goes for the rather tedious patrol reports or regimental diaries. These texts also tell us much about how events have been officially remembered and what former soldiers have regarded, or have been expected to regard, as important.

In my search for material on Indochina I also sifted through veterans' journals and newsletters, as well as through somewhat exotic *almanachs*. These are held at veterans' associations in Paris. It appears as if nobody used this material before, not least because some of it was hidden in the cellar of the UNC. Many of the articles contained, habitually written by senior officers, represented rallying calls for the troops engaged. They did not necessarily echo the views of ordinary soldiers.

Given the focus on personal experiences in this project, I have paid less attention to governmental papers. French reports, telegrams and letters commonly spotlight the scarcity of equipment and manpower, as well as the difficulties of delegating tasks to Indochinese forces. The underlying tone suggests that the war could have been won with better and more numerous resources. British documents are even more technical. Normally, they focus on potential improvements of an already (and seemingly) efficient campaign. Both sets tell us little about the experiences of the troops on the ground. The limits of official reports is best illustrated by the depiction of bombing campaigns and large sweeps in Malaya. While most servicemen on the ground regarded them as ineffective and even dangerous, the reports almost always conclude that the objectives were achieved. Here too, the authors' agendas have to be kept in mind. On one hand they did not wish domestic interference. On the other hand they desired more

<sup>145</sup>

Steve Finnis, who was in charge of the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment Museum, remarked in a letter written on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2006: "I should warn you not to expect too much. Regimental journals tend to be largely devoted to sport and odd in-jokes which are completely incomprehensible after a few years. I know, I used to write for it."

resources. In either case the official picture had to look challenging but bright enough to justify further expenses.

There is also the issue of censorship. Britain's Freedom of Information Act has resulted in better access to files hitherto kept away from the public. But vague titles, lengthy administrative procedures and unexplained rejections can make a researcher's life arduous, even if that is not necessarily the intention. That said, recent research has put at least a question mark behind the official will to shed light on some less positive aspects of British decolonisation.<sup>146</sup> At the SHD, requests for files often produce a slip featuring the comment "non communicable".

Further, this thesis also relies on newspaper and magazine articles. These were often written by journalists, who were close to the action and profited from relatively unrestricted access to servicemen. Back in the 1950s no such thing as 'embedded journalism' existed but censorship and propaganda certainly did. At times it shows. Some generals, such as Templer, waged their own private wars against unwanted journalists but luckily with little success.<sup>147</sup> As a result, some of the articles, increasingly available in online archives, are refreshingly frank.

The internet for its part has generally facilitated the research. In fact, my breakthrough in Britain owed to the NMBVA's website. Further web searches have unearthed various personal and institutional homepages with usually intriguing texts and photographs. However, anyone could place such material onto a website. I have therefore always attempted to contact the authors (or their offspring), asking very specific questions and requesting some kind of proof. In many cases the latter is visible on the sites where photographs show the person in the past and present. In some cases original documents were placed on the sites or sent to me. Speaking of the internet, one should also mention the growing number of archives, such as the IWM or the *Institut nationale de l'audiovisuel* (INA), which contain news clips. Some of these are more government propaganda than anything else, which does not diminish their historical worth. Newer documentaries feature less of the former but, especially if they are French, carry with them a touch of left-wing agenda.<sup>148</sup>

In sum and unsurprisingly, all these sources have advantages and disadvantages. Keeping in mind motivations and spins, it is the combination, comparison and complementarity which offsets the deficiencies of individual material.

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<sup>146</sup> David Anderson, David Branch and Huw Bennett have raised the question of whether British authorities had consciously held back or falsified information regarding the Chuka massacre in Kenya during June 1953. See their article, 'A Very British Massacre', in *History Today*, 56, 8, 2006, 20-22.

<sup>147</sup> Cloake, *Templer of Malaya*, 292-4.

<sup>148</sup> Albert's *Le silence des rizières* certainly does.



## Chapter 1: The British Army, allied forces and the Malayan Emergency

Before scrutinising soldiers' views on Malaya and the emergency it is helpful to provide some information surrounding the troops serving there, decisions by the authorities responsible for them and the global outlook at the time. Further details on quoted protagonists, units, composition, ranks and structures are listed in appendices A, C, E, G and I.

While many details can be gathered from testimonies and the literature, gaps and uncertainties inevitably remain. The reasons lie in missing information in existing primary sources, the sheer number of troops involved in the emergency, the rapid turnover of personnel and the constant re-adjustments made in London. In particular information on regional, family, educational and professional backgrounds has at times been difficult to obtain. On the other hand, service units have regularly been left out in order of battles.

### **Backgrounds of army personnel serving in the Malayan Emergency**

British regulars and conscripts serving in Malaya, together with their Commonwealth counterparts, came from all regions and classes. They ranged in age from barely eighteen to slightly over fifty. A closer examination reveals certain patterns in an otherwise very heterogeneous group. As in other conflicts, the majority of troops in Malaya acted in support of infantry units. They did so as drivers, mechanics, signallers, surveyors, store men, caterers, administrators, doctors, dentists and nurses. Within the infantry one notes a comparatively high proportion of Gurkha, Scottish and, later, Commonwealth units, prompting Robert Jackson to label the emergency as a Commonwealth war.<sup>149</sup>

The veterans, who filled out questionnaires and sat through my interviews, were for the most part born in England between the mid 1920s and 1930s. The majority entered the army after WWII. Most declared themselves to be of working or middle class background. Of the National Servicemen, among whom many left school at an early age, only a minority opted for regular service after the end of their mandatory spells. On the other hand, a majority within the entire sample used for this research consisted of regular commissioned and non-commissioned officers (NCOs). On average these served between five and seven years. Most had seen action in various imperial and WWII theatres, most notably in South Asia, prior to their involvement in the emergency.

During National Service 'potential officer material' was separated from the bulk of recruits in the early stages of basic training. The selection committee looked for men who showed self-confidence, mixed easily, spoke clearly, learnt quickly and performed well in tests. The majority fitting this profile came from public schools and well-to-do-families. In fact, sons of aristocrats, the landed gentry and Tory MPs were automatically put forward for selection to short-service commissions. Some graduates from grammar schools were also encouraged to apply, even if

<sup>149</sup>

R. Jackson, *The Malayan Emergency: The Commonwealth's Wars 1948-1966* (1991).

only “to make up the numbers”. But few recruits with rural accents and modest origins followed this encouragement. Those who did frequently stumbled during the first trials or were taken aback by the prevailing attitudes and stiff competition.<sup>150</sup>

Logically, then, the representatives of the Malayan high command showed similarities in their backgrounds. All ten commanders (if one includes Major-General Sir William Oliver) had been born around the turn of the century. Four of them had fathers with the rank of a (lieutenant-) colonel. With the exception of Lieutenant-General Sir Geoffrey Kemp-Bourne and Major-General Sir Douglas Ashton Wade, all were infantry men and had attended Sandhurst. Everyone, bar the Generals Templer and Oliver, had served in South Asia (and five also in the Arab World) prior to their tour in Malaya. Generals Sir Charles Boucher, Sir Harold Briggs, Kemp-Bourne and Sir Robert Urquhart had all joined the Indian Army. Lieutenant-General Sir Roger Bower had enjoyed an Indian spell but with the King’s Own Light Infantry while Ashton Wade had held staff appointments in Simla, Delhi and Madras. Major-General Sir Hugh Stockwell had grown up in India without entering its army. Crucially, none had entered Malaya before the emergency broke out although Ashton Wade had participated in preparations for the invasion of Malaya.<sup>151</sup>

The middle ranks could usually not make up for the lack of local knowledge hampering these senior officers. Experienced jungle fighters from the Burma campaign were demobilised at the end of WWII while new National Servicemen had to be trained for tropical counter-insurgency.<sup>152</sup> Between June 1945 and the start of 1947 alone 3,887,321 men and 403,533 women were discharged under the release scheme.<sup>153</sup> Speaking of the latter, only nineteen women of the Women’s Voluntary Service (WVS) looked after the welfare of troops in Malaya.<sup>154</sup>

The British effort there relied to a considerable degree on junior ranks, many of them conscripts. These second lieutenants, sergeants and even corporals led small patrols or oversaw ambushes. A typical patrol further included a radio operator, a Bren gunner and several riflemen. The majority of these troops were in their early twenties, as older soldiers would have struggled in the strenuous climate and terrain. Even regular infantrymen were taken out of the jungle after a maximum of two years, and posted elsewhere.<sup>155</sup>

<sup>150</sup> Royle, *The Best Years of Their Lives*, 84-8 and D. Seaton, *Memoirs of a Conscript: National Service 1950-52* (2002), pp. 5-6.

<sup>151</sup> H. C. G. Matthew & B. Harrison, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 52 (2004), pp. 836-7 and vol. 54 (2004), pp. 99-100, *Who Was Who*, vol. V, 1951-60 (1964), pp. 120-1 and 135-6 and vol. VIII, 1981-1990 (1991), pp. 80, 82 and 772 as well as [www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries).

<sup>152</sup> Farrar-Hockley in Chandler & Beckett, *The Oxford History of the British Army*, 316.

<sup>153</sup> ‘Report for the year 1947’ by the Minister of Labour and National Service to Parliament, chapter III, pp. 26-7, Parliamentary Papers 1947-8, IV, LSE.

<sup>154</sup> R. A. Bonner, *Jungle Bashers: A British Infantry Battalion in the Malayan Emergency 1951-1954* (2002), p. 70.

<sup>155</sup> Royle, *The Best Years of Their Lives*, 168.

## Re-entry into Malaya, turnovers and the outbreak of the emergency

The surprise of Japan's sudden surrender accounts for the fact that the first British and Indian troops did not land in Penang until September 3.<sup>156</sup> Between their arrival and the emergency the Allied Land Forces Southeast Asia fell from almost 250,000 in October 1945 to just under 30,000 by 1948 due to demobilisation.<sup>157</sup>

To man garrisons like Malaya, Whitehall hoped to replace India with Africa as a recruiting ground between 1946 and 1947.<sup>158</sup> Given metropolitan resistance and the short duration of National Service the use of British conscripts was largely out of the question. But on 9 November 1947 an agreement was reached with the governments of Nepal and India for the use of Gurkhas after the British exit from the subcontinent. As a result, eight battalions were transferred to the British Army with the majority ending up in Malaya where they replaced British and Indian troops.<sup>159</sup>

Meanwhile, the British Military Administration (BMA) attempted to stabilise the turbulent social and economic situation in Malaya prior to handing over to civilians in April 1946. But its staff – consisting of locally hired planters and traders as well as of demobilised servicemen – failed to tackle many of the pressing problems while acting severely against organised protests.<sup>160</sup>

When the emergency was declared Major-General Sir Ashton Wade had only thirteen infantry units at his disposal. They included seven partially formed Gurkha battalions, three British and two (British officered) Malaya Regiment battalions. In addition, one British artillery regiment acted in an infantry role. The 12,000 police officers were gradually reinforced by 25,000 (part-time) special constables, who would prove crucial for the protection of isolated plantations.<sup>161</sup>

Over the years these forces steadily grew allowing the army to abandon its initially passive role. When General Sir Gerald Templer arrived in 1952 he could draw on approximately twenty-three battalions (excluding SAS units),<sup>162</sup> roughly 67,000 police officers and 250,000 home guards.<sup>163</sup> The police itself was divided into 22,187 regular officers and 44,878 special constables.<sup>164</sup> These ground forces were supported by a considerable air fleet. By December 1953 it included six and a half squadrons for offensive warfare, three transport and two reconnaissance squadrons plus various planes for communication purposes, including propaganda. Towards the end of the conflict the navy and air force would also provide up to three squadrons of helicopters for transport and evacuation. In addition, various navy ships prevented enemy infiltration and bombarded coastal areas.

<sup>156</sup> Bayly & Harper, *Forgotten Wars*, 12-13, 108 and 457-61.

<sup>157</sup> Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia*, 111.

<sup>158</sup> While the Colonial Office showed a distinct interest in this shift the War Office cited the additional cost of recruitment, training and maintenance as well as the inferior standard of such troops in comparison to British ones. See R. Hyam (ed.), *The Labour Government and the End of Empire, 1945-1951. Part III: Strategy, Politics and Constitutional Change*, BDEE series A, vol. 2 (1992), pp. 406-10.

<sup>159</sup> Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia*, 110-1.

<sup>160</sup> M. Rudner, 'The Organisation of the British Military Administration in Malaya, 1945-46', reprinted from the *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, vol. 9, no. 1, March 1968, pp. 95-106, Rhodes House, 915.16r21 (5)).

<sup>161</sup> Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in South East Asia*, 113 & 118 and Bayly & Harper, *Forgotten Wars*, 436-7.

<sup>162</sup> This amounted to more than 50,000 men. See Bayly & Harper, *Forgotten Wars*, 470.

<sup>163</sup> Hack, *Defence and Colonisation in South East Asia*, 124.

<sup>164</sup> 'A comparative study of the emergencies in Malaya and Kenya' by the Operational Research Unit (Far East), 6.6.1957, WO 291/1670.

These combined forces lost 4,377 men through injuries, death and disappearance. The police suffered most with 85 officers and 625 other ranks killed among all Commonwealth forces combined.<sup>165</sup>

### Command structure

During an interview conducted in 1984 the later Field-Marshal Sir John Harding described the higher military and political set-up in Malaya and Southeast Asia during his tenure there between 1949 and 1951.<sup>166</sup> At the top of the regional set-up Harding joined, stood the British Defence Co-ordination Committee (BDCC) headed by Malcolm MacDonald, the Governor-General of British Southeast Asia.<sup>167</sup> The committee, which also included the navy's and air force's regional commanders-in-chief, defined defence strategies and policies in the Far East. The commanders' area of responsibility reached from Burma to Japan so that Harding was in charge of troops in Malaya, Singapore and Hong Kong. His job also included "a watching brief over any requirements in Borneo and the liaison with the French in Indo-China". One year after his arrival the Korean War also entered his agenda.

The lower organisational levels were repeatedly debated, dissolved and restructured. Nevertheless, the principle of three defence layers remained more or less intact during the emergency. In 1951 this meant that the BDCC was in charge at a theatre level, i.e. the Far East including Southeast Asia. At the area level, i.e. Malaya and Singapore, stood the Malayan Defence Coordination Committee (MDCC) comprising the high commissioners/governors and the four local service commanders. Further, each separate, (colonial) territory featured a local defence committee, headed by the governments' departmental officers and local service commanders' staff. Under the Briggs Plan the Malayan set-up was expanded into, from top to bottom, the Federal War Council (later merged into the Executive Council and assisted by the Federal Joint Intelligence Advisory Committee), State War Executive Committees (SWECS) and District War Executive Committees (DWECS). The committees and councils were usually composed of the most senior administrator, police officer (including Special Branch representatives), military commander plus community representatives at the corresponding

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<sup>165</sup> WO 106/5990.

<sup>166</sup> Imperial War Museum (sound section), accession number 8736. The following four paragraphs are based on his description.

<sup>167</sup> Appointed in 1946 MacDonald's role consisted in co-ordinating policy in the region and to oversee the work of governors. In practice he acted mostly as broker between British and Asians. In addition to MacDonald, Miles Lampson was assigned as a special commissioner to Southeast Asia. His wide responsibilities included solving the regional food crisis after WWII and acting as independent negotiator in Indonesia. While MacDonald reported to the Colonial Office, Lampson's superiors were in the Foreign Office. From May 1948 on MacDonald combined both roles. See Bayly & Harper, *Forgotten Wars*, 216 and 279 and 'The Colonial Empire (1947-1948)', report by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Parliament, June 1948, p. 29, Parliamentary Papers 1947-48, XI.

levels. At the height of the emergency they met daily and operated alongside the traditional administration.<sup>168</sup>

When Harding assumed his responsibilities, Major-General Boucher had replaced Ashton Wade as commander of the troops in Malaya. Units stationed in Singapore were commanded by General Dunlop. Up until April 1950 the commissioner of police coordinated operations against the communist insurgents in Malaya with the army and air force in support.<sup>169</sup> Commanders of the latter two reported to High-Commissioner Sir Henry Gurney.

Harding emphasised that he was not directly involved in the conduct of the counter-insurgency. He 'merely' oversaw the overall administration of troops, thus making sure they were efficiently used and morale was maintained. Even so, he gained the impression that the entire security apparatus lacked "operational urgency", especially the police. He also bemoaned the absence of up-to-date and qualified intelligence personnel, equipment (particularly armoured vehicles) and institutions. Given these impressions, he pushed London for a man in overall charge of security operations and with direct access to the high-commissioner. This man would be Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Briggs. Despite improved coordination of the security forces and growing isolation of the insurgents under the latter's tenure, Briggs himself still deemed his responsibilities too restrictive. Hence General Templer's combined task of commander-in-chief<sup>170</sup> and high-commissioner. He reported directly to the colonial secretary, Oliver Lyttelton.

### Attempting to shift the burden

The huge military, political and financial<sup>171</sup> effort made in Malaya (and in Korea between 1950 and 1953) ran counter to London's intentions to scale down the number of regional British troops and to entrust regional defence to an expanded Malaya Regiment and Gurkha reserves. (As a result and like the French, they struggled to provide the divisions promised to NATO for the defence of Europe.) The continued focus on (Southeast) Asia owed to London's realisation that the region, particularly the valuable dollar-earner Malaya, was experiencing 'hot conflicts' within the Cold War. While London eventually accepted the inevitability of a long-term political disentanglement, it was not prepared to hand over power to communists, who were likely to sever the economic ties, too.<sup>172</sup>

Nevertheless, the foundation for the original reduction plans had existed for some time. The Malay Regiment had been raised as early as the 1920s and had participated in the defence of the peninsula in 1941. Resurrected after WWII, it was comprised of four entirely Malay battalions

<sup>168</sup> 'British Defence Co-ordination Committee, Far East. Defence Organisation in the Malayan and Borneo Territories', memorandum by the Deputy Commissioner General for Colonial Affairs and the Head of the Far East Defence Secretariat, 2.1.1951, FO 1091/37, National Archives, Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 88 and A. Short, *In Pursuit of Mountain Rats: The Communist Insurrection in Malaya* (2000), p. 239-40.

<sup>169</sup> WO 106/5990.

<sup>170</sup> Templer and Briggs delegated the conduct of army operations to Major-Generals Urquhart and Stockwell respectively.

<sup>171</sup> The emergency required £420 million on top of traditional garrison costs between 1948 and 1957, plus various direct grants to the Malayan government.

<sup>172</sup> Holland, *European Decolonization 1918-1981*, 108.

by the end of 1950.<sup>173</sup> In 1953 the legislative council set the target for 1962 at nine battalions for the Malay Regiment and three battalions for an ethnically mixed Federation Regiment. The total would be 12,000 men. But due to recruiting problems and prevailing communist sympathies, particularly among the Chinese, only seven and one came into being. Templer also pressed for the creation of the Federation Military College in Port Dickson to kick-start officer training. Thanks to these efforts internal security could be handed over to the Malayan government in January 1956. Yet the 1957 Defence Agreement cemented Britain's continuous international duties in the area and its supporting role to the new government.<sup>174</sup> A small garrison thus remained.

By 1951 three Malayan Auxiliary Air Force squadrons had also been put together. But even after independence neither air personnel nor equipment could perform without British assistance. The same applied to the Royal Malayan Navy, based in Singapore. (The situation turned even more complicated following the break-up of the union of Malaya and Singapore in 1965.)

Meanwhile, Britain still operated its own Far East fleet to protect communications in the Commonwealth. Yet budget restrictions led to a rapid reduction by 1947. In addition to the involvement in Malaya, the diminishing fleet assisted UN/US forces in Korea and penetrated the Yangtze for the possible evacuation of British personnel.

Furthermore, Britain turned towards the wider empire or Commonwealth respectively. After lengthy stalling the Australian government ordered a limited number of transport aircraft and bombers to Malaya in May 1950. Five years later an infantry battalion followed. New Zealand, too, maintained a squadron of the SAS regiment in the territory between January 1956 and August 1957.<sup>175</sup> Additional contingents from East Africa, Southern Rhodesia and Fiji permitted a reduction of British and Gurkha units by 1956. That year twenty-three multi-ethnic battalions were operating on the peninsula.<sup>176</sup>

### **The British military after WWII – general situation**

Most British regiments not only provided battalions and companies for the emergency but also for many other imperial garrisons and conflicts. This piled further pressure on a badly weakened economy, which had seen total foreign debt explode from £500,000,000 to £3,250,000,000 from 1939 to 1945. Worse, the US terminated the lend-lease deals without delay after Japan's surrender. British military planners also had to take into account that Britain's fleet had been reduced by eleven million tons during the global conflict. Despite recognising the need for cuts, the government was still spending twenty percent of its gross national product on defence in

<sup>173</sup> On December 15 of that year High-Commissioner Gurney announced that the government could order any man between 17 and 45 (residing in the territory) to perform military or police service. See Short, *In Pursuit of Mountain Rats*, 252.

<sup>174</sup> 'The Colonial Territories 1956-1957', report by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Parliament, June 1957, p. 24, Parliamentary Papers 1956-57, 10, LSE.  
WO 106/5990.

<sup>176</sup> Bulk of entire section based on Hack & Rettig, *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia*, 253-60 and Cloake, *Templer*, 246.

1946.<sup>177</sup> By the end of the emergency the estimated cost of the (total) defence programme for 1960-1 amounted to 1,616 million pounds, i.e. roughly a quarter of total government expenditure.<sup>178</sup>

Apart from Malaya, earlier policing and counter-insurgency tasks in Italy, Greece, Palestine, Burma, India, Indonesia and Indochina presented the greatest obstacles to budgetary and administrative reductions.<sup>179</sup> The task facing the allied commander for Southeast Asia, Admiral Louis Mountbatten, was particularly daunting. After Japan's surrender he was responsible for over one and a half million square miles, 128 million people, his own forces and 738,000 surrendered Japanese soldiers.<sup>180</sup>

Apart from areas previously controlled by other (European) countries, Britain also had to occupy the defeated Axis powers themselves and defend them against possible Soviet aggression. Set up in 1946, the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) eventually counted four divisions<sup>181</sup> and placed a particularly heavy burden on the Royal Armoured Corps and the Royal Artillery.

In the early 1950s the Egyptian Wafd Party pressed for a complete British withdrawal from the canal zone. The ensuing Suez crisis (1956) required the costly involvement of the navy and airborne troops. Britain also intervened in support of allied governments or to safeguard British economic interests in Iran (1951-3), Jordan (1958), Kuwait (1961) and Aden (1964-7). It declared further emergencies in Kenya (1952-9), Cyprus (1955-9), where counter-insurgency campaigns ensued, and in the Central African Federation (1959). On numerous occasions army units also had to support local police during strikes, demonstrations and other limited disturbances all over the remaining British possessions.

Contrary to the situation in Malaya, Britain could no longer count on the support of its imperial or Commonwealth partners on those occasions. Canberra and Wellington signalled their focus on Asia and the Pacific through the signature of the ANZUS treaty in 1951. India had ceased to provide imperial troops on the cheap since the 1920s. After independence even that option was politically and financially no longer feasible.<sup>182</sup>

### National Service and the Sandys White Paper

A possible solution to all these troubles lay in metropolitan conscription. But after WWII the government had reduced the period of military service to one year and had introduced peacetime accounting. It aimed at reducing the forces to 940,000 by March 1948 from a wartime peak of 5.1

<sup>177</sup> French, *The British Way in Warfare*, 212.

<sup>178</sup> 'Report on Defence 1961' by the Minister of Defence to Parliament, February 1961, appendix (p. 11 and 16), Parliamentary Papers 1960-61, 24, LSE.

<sup>179</sup> Farrar-Hockley in Chandler & Beckett, *The Oxford History of the British Army*, 317.

<sup>180</sup> P. Dennis, *Troubled Days of Peace: Mountbatten and South East Asia Command, 1945-46* (1987), p. 225.

<sup>181</sup> Seven divisions were originally planned but never attained.

<sup>182</sup> Three paragraphs based on French, *The British Way in Warfare*, 216 and 219. Reference to India from J. M. Brown, 'India' in J. M. Brown & W. M. R. Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 4: *The Twentieth Century* (1999), pp. 439.

million.<sup>183</sup> By 1949 the figure was down to 700,000 men. Military planners fretted over the fact that the average six-months training and three-month journeys to and from postings left conscripts little time for adjustments to overseas theatres. Equally worrying was the lack of seasoned cadres, which necessitated unusual promotions for the remaining ones. To ease the pressure on these regulars, frequently used for training purposes, the authorities improved service pay and allowances<sup>184</sup> to attract more men for longer service – to little avail.<sup>185</sup> As a result, a large percentage of soldiers posted to Malaya and other hotspots were conscripts.<sup>186</sup>

In 1947 the British Army possessed roughly 77 infantry battalions (excluding specialists corps), eight Gurkha Rifles units, plus 69 artillery and 30 armoured regiments. In these units served 1,132,872 National Service officers and other ranks who participated in 57 conflicts between 1947 and 1963. (More than two million were called up for all three services combined.)<sup>187</sup> Of the 2,912 killed in action 395 were conscripts.

In Malaya National Servicemen were especially numerous. They made up half of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment for instance. The same went for 90% of all lance-corporals and 50% of corporals of the succeeding 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion the Somerset Light Infantry.<sup>188</sup> Overall half of the army consisted of conscripts by 1951. Not all of them (or their professional colleagues) saw actual combat. Most were needed for support services and the many garrisons still spread over the empire.

The original National Service Bill passed in July 1947, set the duration of conscription at one year. (Those called up under wartime regulation still had to do two years.) It was to be followed by five years in the reserve. As military commitments multiplied the National Service Amendment Act was introduced in December 1948 extending mandatory service to eighteen months (but limiting reserve duties to four years). The outbreak of the Korean War prompted a further extension to twenty-four months (plus three and a half years in the reserve). This set-up remained in force until the termination of National Service in 1963. Until then every British man between eighteen and twenty-six had to do his military duty. This included all British citizens resident in the United Kingdom and nationals of the Dominions (including Ireland) having resided in the UK for at least two years and opting not to return. From 1949 on it also applied to residents on the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. Officially, the authorities excluded blacks, Asians and Northern Irish deeming them potential risks for the cohesion of the armed forces. In the case of the former two no law actually spelled this out. As a result a few hundred coloured men did actually serve. The authorities equally ruled out members of the clergy, persons held or treated in connection with lunacy and mental (treatment) acts, the blind and those otherwise categorised as physically unfit. The same applied to conscientious objectors if the courts accepted them as such.

<sup>183</sup> Figure taken from 'Report for the year 1947' by the Minister of Labour and National Service to Parliament, November 1948, p. 11, Parliamentary Papers 1947-48, IV, LSE.

<sup>184</sup> Pay and allowances more than doubled between 1946 and 1961. See 'Report on Defence' by the Minister of Defence, February 1961, p. 16, Parliamentary Papers 1960-61, 24, LSE.

<sup>185</sup> Farrar-Hockley in Chandler & Beckett, *The Oxford History of the British Army*, 316-8.

<sup>186</sup> That said, only a comparatively small percentage of troops were actually sent to overseas territories in general. See L. V. Scott, *Conscription and the Attlee Governments: The Politics and Policy of National Service, 1945-1951* (1993), p. 266.

<sup>187</sup> K. Miller, *730 Days Until Demob! National Service and the Post-1945 British Army* (2003), p. 28.

<sup>188</sup> Royle, *The Best Years of Their Lives*, 164-5 and 171. These were admittedly very high figures and not necessarily representative.



Candidates claiming hardship (as the only sons of dependent widows for instance), coalminers, (certain) agricultural workers, merchant seamen and seagoing fishermen (if they were prepared to enter the Royal Naval Reserve) could defer their service, potentially beyond the age of 30. So could apprentices, students and people in professional training, albeit only until the termination of their courses.<sup>189</sup>

Although the military appreciated the large manpower available it increasingly worried about the latter's quality. With reason: the large number of conscripts put off many potential regular servicemen. The problems became obvious during the Suez crisis when training and equipment left much to be desired. Thankfully, the final departure from the canal (and previously from India), coupled with the availability of long-range aircraft and nuclear weapons, reduced the need for a large strategic reserve. With Britain experiencing a boom in the 1950s it was the economy that required more young employees. These deliberations led to the phasing out of conscription with the last intake entering the forces in 1960. On May 16, 1963 the last National Serviceman was discharged.<sup>190</sup>

Six years earlier Defence Secretary Duncan Sandys had published a white paper on the future British military strategy. He held the opinion that Britain's best safeguard lay in a strong economy and that the latter depended on deep cuts in the military budget. He expressed his hope that nuclear armed V-bombers would allow for a reduction in manpower to 375,000 by 1962 (thus making conscription superfluous). Similar cutbacks would apply to the navy and air force. Smaller bases in Kenya, Singapore, Cyprus and Aden, mobile troop reserves and a naval amphibious force in the Indian Ocean would allow for rapid responses to future emergencies. Based on this scheme defence spending was cut from 6.9% of GNP to 5.9% between 1957 and 1965. Despite this, roughly 100,000 men still served east of Suez in the early 1960s, some of them fighting in the confrontation with Indonesia (1963-66).<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Paragraph based on Scott, *Conscription and the Attlee Governments*, appendix 3 and Miller, *730 Days Until Demob!*, 9 and 11-12. Criteria for and results of medical assessments of recruits are detailed in 'Instructions for the Guidance of the Medical Board under the National Service Acts' by the Ministry of Labour and National Service, (revised) January 1956 and 'A Survey Based on National Service Medical Examinations' by the Ministry of Health, 1960, (both) NA, MH 78/286. The latter shows rejection rates of men examined steadily rising from 13% in 1948 to 36.5% in 1960.

<sup>190</sup> Miller, *730 Days Until Demob!*, 70-7.

<sup>191</sup> French, *The British Way in Warfare*, 218-20.

## Chapter 2: The French Army, allied forces and the Indochina War

The following passages shed some light on the composition of the *Corps expéditionnaire de l'Extrême-Orient* (CEFEO).<sup>192</sup> In parallel, they outline the state of and developments within the French Army (and to some extent its sister branches) at the outbreak of the Indochina War.

Existing sources provide us with fairly exact details on troop numbers in Indochina, units, compositions and soldiers' backgrounds. (They are systematically listed in appendices B, D, F, H and J.) But limits and ambiguities remain. Understandably military administrators did not concern themselves too much with regional, social and educational origins of servicemen. One has to attempt to gather these details from personal testimonies. Yet background information is especially rare when it comes to ordinary soldiers and NCOs, who are under-represented in archival records and literature.<sup>193</sup>

Not all archival files are available. Several requests for instance were refused at the SHD without explanations.<sup>194</sup> On the other hand, available statistics do not always clearly state which parts of the military have been considered. For instance, the *gendarmerie* and the *gardes républicaines*,<sup>195</sup> both of which can be regarded as entities separate from the army, are often included in official figures without being specifically mentioned. Similarly, estimates of metropolitan personnel have not always spelled out whether or not the large French cadres (generally more numerous than British ones) commanding African, Asian and Foreign Legion units have been taken into account. Tracing the history of a particular unit can also be a daunting task. Many were disbanded, merged or re-created over the decades and especially so after WWII. Demobilisation, voluntary departures, purges and losses during and after the latter could further alter their make-up.<sup>196</sup> Then there is the sometimes confusing structure of the army itself. The (*Armée*) *coloniale* for example used to be part of the navy (*marine*) until 1900 and again from 1958 on. Like the *Armée d'Afrique*<sup>197</sup> it contained mixed units. Both branches also featured entirely European units such as the *zouaves* or troops of the *Coloniale blanche*.<sup>198</sup>

### Patterns

These statistical difficulties aside, the CEFEO sample used for this research entails striking features. To begin with, the bulk of servicemen cited held the ranks of officers, with the majority

<sup>192</sup> French Expeditionary Corps for the Far East.

<sup>193</sup> Raphaël Delpard has argued that many of them had fled the dire conditions in France or difficult family situations. See *Les rizières de la souffrance*, 51-4.

<sup>194</sup> This concerns for instance: 'Rapports mensuels des différents territoires et corps de troupe (1945-1955)', 1951, SHAT, 10H 1980-1982.

<sup>195</sup> See appendix H for explanations on these bodies.

<sup>196</sup> General Massu mentioned in his memoirs that many men of Leclerc's 2<sup>e</sup> DB opted to leave the army after the end of hostilities in Europe. See Massu, *Sept ans avec Leclerc*, 224.

<sup>197</sup> The *Armée d'Afrique* constituted the traditional garrison for North Africa and an additional reserve for the defence of France. The *Coloniale* was employed in the rest of the empire.

<sup>198</sup> Clayton, *The Wars of French Decolonization*, 4.

having graduated from St. Cyr and the *Ecole polytechnique*.<sup>199</sup> As regards age, the oldest protagonist, General de Lattre, was born in 1889, the youngest, the later actor, Alain Delon, in 1935. Among those, whose place of birth is indicated, seven originated outside of France. In the entire group one finds many with military ancestors. During WWII most of the servicemen considered here rallied to the Free French (and the allies) either in 1940 or in 1942/3. One also finds several who joined the resistance. Following that decision, they were either arrested and sent to labour and concentration camps. Or they linked up with the troops amassing in North Africa. Of these, many participated in the Italian campaign and/or landed in Provence.

It is obvious that the *troupes coloniales*, among them many former Free French, and representatives of the *Armée d'Afrique*, as well as the Foreign Legion, initially made up the bulk of manpower employed in Indochina.<sup>200</sup> Logically, many of these protagonists had had spells in North Africa while very few of the entire CEFEO had ever set foot on Indochina. In the course of the war Indochinese troops, both regular and irregular, replaced above as the largest faction fighting the Viet Minh. Although difficult to ascertain for lack of specific sources, it can be expected that, like in the British case, the majority of troops were service units. Testimonies suggest that headquarters employed a particularly large number.<sup>201</sup>

## The CEFEO

French governments had already dispatched expeditionary corps to Madagascar (1895), China (1900 and 1902), the Dardanelles (1915 and 1916), Scandinavia (1940) and Italy (1943). The birth of the CEFEO dates back to July 1943 when the Permanent Military Committee in Algiers decided on a French intervention in the Pacific. But the corps' organisation, starting in spring 1944, was marred by various difficulties. Transport for instance depended almost entirely on British vessels and planes. Access to Indochina had to await American approval, which was initially not forthcoming. All these aspects led the military authorities to conclude that they could not envision a deployment before spring 1946. Yet the sudden capitulation of Japan in August 1945 necessitated a quicker re-entry.<sup>202</sup> Instead of fighting alongside the allies against the Japanese, the CEFEO now had to reassert control of a territory in turmoil and temporarily occupied by British and Chinese forces.

<sup>199</sup> See appendix B for information on training institutions.

<sup>200</sup> Anthony Clayton has maintained that many *Coloniale* officers, such as Marcel Bigeard, customarily came from the French lower-middle classes. In contrast, a number of *Armée d'Afrique* officers originated from aristocratic and/or land-owning families, as well as the *haute bourgeoisie*. Strong Catholic and royalist traditions ran in their blood. See Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 9, 197-223 and 307-30.

<sup>201</sup> See for example interview with British ex-liaison officer, H. H. Hill, 13.6.1986, IWM (audio section), 9314.

<sup>202</sup> Lt. M. Bourlet & Lt. A.-A. Inquimbert, 'Le corps expéditionnaire: évolution et mutations' in *Revue historique des armées*, n° 4, 2001, pp. 35 and 44.

## Military and civilian responsibilities during the conflict

Officially, the definition of military operations and the political strategy in Indochina rested in the hands of the provisional government in Paris, i.e. the president (of the council) and increasingly, the Ministry for Overseas France.<sup>203</sup> Supported by the *Comité interministériel de l'Indochine*<sup>204</sup> they were supposed to issue orders for the high-commissioner, the first being Admiral d'Argenlieu. (The first commander-in-chief, General Leclerc, should have reported to the latter but never fully accepted the set-up.) In reality and in regard to the conduct of war, the Defence Committee studied and suggested actions, which were then decided on by the Higher Council of National Defence (presided over by the head of the provisory government). Technically, the Ministry of the Armies and The Ministry for Overseas Territories represented the executive. In truth, decisions could come from eight different bodies but were often left to the men on the spot. It was not until 1955 that the president assumed overall coordinative responsibility.

As in peacetimes, the budget for operations was devised one year in advance based on expenditures in the previous year. Unsurprisingly, this led to frequent delays and shortages.<sup>205</sup> The military organisation in Indochina itself consisted of five classic *bureaux* and up to five regional headquarters. Navy and air force were at the disposition of the commander-in-chief but took their orders from the high-commissioner.<sup>206</sup>

## Build-up of forces

On September 12, 1945 120 men of the 5<sup>e</sup> *Régiment d'Infanterie coloniale* (RIC) disembarked in Saigon (alongside elements of the 20<sup>th</sup> Indian Division) marking the beginning of the re-conquest. Further reinforcements arrived steadily but slowly. As late as September 25, 1945 French forces in Indochina amounted to not more than approximately 2,500 men. They derived from Leclerc's *Groupe mobile* (GM)/2<sup>e</sup> *Demi-brigade* (DB), the 5<sup>e</sup> RIC, as well as from the 9<sup>e</sup> and parts of the 3<sup>e</sup> *Division d'Infanterie coloniale* (DIC). 1,400 survivors of the 11<sup>e</sup> RIC, who had been imprisoned by the Japanese, eventually reinforced this contingent. By the end of the year the CEFEO had swollen to 27,907 men. By March 15, 1946 it counted 3,118 officers, 7,965 *sous-officiers*<sup>207</sup> and 41,170 soldiers (*hommes de rang*). Over time a further 1,151 officers, 2,896 NCOs and 4,979 men (including indigenous troops) recovered on the spot, joined them. Five months later though 36,000 servicemen, exhausted or due for demobilisation, were already repatriated. Among them figured

<sup>203</sup> The resort initially fell into the responsibility of the Ministry for the Colonies and from 1950 on (also) into that of the Ministry for the Associated States. See A. Ruscio, *La guerre française d'Indochine*, 255-7.

<sup>204</sup> Created in February 1945 *Comindo* was headed by General de Langlade and composed of the cabinet chief, representatives of concerned ministries, the head of the *services spéciaux* and the director of political affairs within the Ministry of Colonies. See Dalloz, *Dictionnaire de la guerre d'Indochine*, 65-6.

<sup>205</sup> De Lattre at one point bitterly complained about slow deliveries of ammunition. See: 'Ravitaillement du Corps Expéditionnaire en munitions et artillerie', de Lattre to the minister responsible for relations with the associated states, June 1951, SHAT, 10H 212.

<sup>206</sup> Cpt. J.-C. Raguet, 'Logistique et décision dans l'Indochine de 1945-1946' in *Revue historique des armées*, n° 3, 1996, p. 52.

<sup>207</sup> NCOs.

the approximately 9,000 men of the *Armée d'Indochine*,<sup>208</sup> the 9<sup>e</sup> DIC, GM./2<sup>e</sup> DB. and the *Elément organique de corps d'armée* (EOCA).

By 1948 land forces comprised 63 infantry battalions, 6 parachute battalions, 12 armoured group-squadrons, 14 artillery groups, 4 transport groups, service battalions and companies, as well as 3 legions of republican guards. Within these units the number of French personnel progressively diminished, particularly in infantry and service units. Whereas all soldiers were French in 1945, their percentage reached an all-time low of 41.3% (land forces) by October 1952. In the first half of the conflict the tendency was to make up the figures by filling the gaps with African troops and Foreign Legionnaires.<sup>209</sup> The figures for the *Forces terrestres de l'Extrême-Orient* (FTEO) show these changes:<sup>210</sup>

Year	French	Legionnaires	North-Africans	(other) Africans	Total
1945	27,297				27,297
1946	61,924				61,924
1947	63,815				71,857 <sup>211</sup>
1948	43,989	11,886	13,318	5,014	74,234
1949	45,496	16,952	24,364	12,090	98,420
1950	44,067	16,844	21,356	13,389	95,656
1951	51,479	19,479	32,712	19,434	123,034
1952	50,342	19,360	29,571	17,917	117,190
1953	53,227	18,440	37,409	18,646	127,767
1954	50,243	14,462	34,772	18,887	118,364

### Recruiting problems

Lack of resources plagued the CEFEQ throughout the conflict. During the war only 1,000-1,500 French signed up in all military branches per month. Alarmed, the army's chief-of-staff, General Blanc, pointed out that France could not guarantee the necessary reliefs to even maintain the number of troops stationed in Indochina either in 1950 or in 1951.<sup>212</sup> To compensate for slow reinforcements normal tours in Indochina (including training), which normally lasted 24 to 27

<sup>208</sup> In the 1930s it had consisted of two infantry divisions and two independent brigades. See General Staff, War Office, *Handbook of the French Army* (1940, reprinted by the IWM in 2004), p. 155.

<sup>209</sup> Both paragraphs and table taken from Bodin, *La France et ses soldats*, 5-22 and 36.

<sup>210</sup> All figures refer to estimates on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December of each year, except in 1954 (1<sup>st</sup> of July). The author has not explained whether these forces included the *gendarmerie*, republican guards and female personnel. It should also be noted that Bodin has quoted different figures for Africans in *Les africains dans la guerre d'Indochine*, 10.

<sup>211</sup> It is unclear how this total has been calculated.

<sup>212</sup> 'Note relative à l'Indochine', General Blanc to unknown recipient, 4.2.1950, SHAT, 10H 212.

months, were frequently extended by several months.<sup>213</sup> Some experienced NCOs and officers stayed in Indochina for much longer. 41 captains of the artillery and cavalry were found to be older than 40 in April 1953 after serving in the territory for more than four years.

The search for French personnel led on occasions to the enlistment of physically and psychologically handicapped men. In 1952 169 personnel had to be repatriated after three months. Among them were 24 mentally ill, 10 alcoholics and 14 tuberculosis cases. By the same token, 80% of volunteers for the land forces were illiterate in the second semester 1952.<sup>214</sup>

Until 1951 troops were sent to Indochina after five to six months of previous military service. In the ensuing years their successors embarked with only three months experience. These deficiencies, coupled with exhaustion, meant that the number of servicemen, who could only serve in static roles, steadily rose. Even the commander of the elite 2<sup>e</sup> *Bataillon étranger parachutiste* lamented in 1950 that rebels escaped his men because the legionnaires were too exhausted to pursue them beyond a hundred yards.<sup>215</sup>

Despite that, the average French soldier performed more or less satisfactorily in the services. But particularly men from the increasingly exploited reserve<sup>216</sup> proved to be unsuited for combat units. The quality of NCOs was deemed “problematic” in the infantry, “worrying” among engineering and artillery units, and “very worrying” in transmission.<sup>217</sup> A third of all officers serving in 1954 turned out to be insufficiently adapted to their tasks or incapable to do them at all, not least because many had never served with Asian or African troops.

Despite various recruitment drives, the quantity of servicemen remained below target, especially in the infantry and transport. By 1949 the infantry lacked 37% of officers and 64% of soldiers. The services were short by 16% and 35% respectively. While the target for officers in the land forces was 4.5% in 1949 it oscillated between 3.07% and 3.9% from 1948 to 1949. Over the eight years of the war the percentage of NCOs ranged between 16.06% and 17.99%. (In parachute battalions officers and NCOs made up merely 2.2% and 11.4% by 1953.) Since many of these cadres were stationed in headquarters and smaller garrisons the percentage for combatant troops was even lower. Some units lacked between 20-30% of the original manpower due to wounds, sickness, recovery or leave. In the later stages of the war some lacked 80% of their *adjudants*. The expeditionary corps also lost the equivalent of two battalions through judiciary proceedings (condemnations and preventive decisions) after 1950.<sup>218</sup>

<sup>213</sup> This could mean excessive tours for Africans in particular. A Colonel Schneider calculated that an African serving even an official 27-month tour in Indochina was really away from home for 39 months if one included training, wait, transport and leave. See ‘Ministère de la France d’outre-mer, dépenses militaires pour 1954’. France, *Journal Officiel*, 1954, January-June, *Débats (de l’Assemblée de l’Union Française)*, 18.2.1954, LSE 44 (R26) AUF1.

<sup>214</sup> This obviously included many non-Europeans.

<sup>215</sup> D. Porch, *The French Foreign Legion: A Complete History* (1991), p. 529.

<sup>216</sup> The authorities encouraged NCOs and officers from the reserve to re-enlist. Many, often from more modest backgrounds, demanded themselves to be integrated after a short period of re-training. By May 1948 13,3% of all officers and 2,3% of all NCOs came from the reserve.

<sup>217</sup> A report on French officers and NCOs seconded to the 4<sup>e</sup> *Division vietnamienne* issued in March 1951 echoed these problems. The author quoted the examples of one lieutenant regarded as inept while a captain was deemed “unstable”. A lieutenant and a subaltern/2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant had to be hospitalised and a further lieutenant had lost an eye in an accident. Five more officers were held on hold because they could not be trusted to command small garrisons. The total of officers was 76. See Private collection of General Georges Fricaud-Chagnaud, SHAT 1K 590.

<sup>218</sup> Entire section based on Bodin, *La France et ses soldats*, 19, 21 and 131-142.

### Additional French personnel

Indochina saw almost 14,000 gendarmes and republican guards serving in Indochina where their main tasks consisted in training local units. On October 15, 1951 the Defence Committee also decided to allow the dispatch of *volunteering* conscripts to Indochina, provided they had already served for six months. (Previously they could not be sent into the war.) Their tours in Southeast Asia, consisting mostly of garrison duties, lasted between eight and nine months. Conscripts could petition the authorities to let them join combat troops and 58 volunteered to fight in Dien Bien Phu. Still, their overall number stood at a meagre 425 in 1951, rose to 2,430 in 1952 and fell again to 570 by the end of the war. Equally few enlisted after their mandatory military service ended. Only 580 joined the FTEO in the second semester 1950.<sup>219</sup> In addition to conscripts, navy commandos operated in Indochina, particularly in the deltas.

The Foreign Legion for its part actively recruited (and often press-ganged) POWs at the end of WWII, which explains the high deserting rates. Further, WWII-collaborators, among them former members of the *Légion des volontaires français contre le bolchevisme* (LVF)<sup>220</sup> constituted two companies of the *Bataillon d'infanterie légère d'Outre-mer* (BILOM).<sup>221</sup>

Moreover, between 700 and 1,600 *Personnel féminin de l'armée de terre* (PFAT) served in Indochina,<sup>222</sup> together with 120 in the air force and 30 in the navy.<sup>223</sup> Another 470, mostly wives of military and civilian personnel stationed in Indochina, acted as social assistants, nurses (often coupled with flying and driving duties) and secretaries in the forces. Almost one hundred of all these women, many of whom earned medals for their bravery, were killed during the conflict. One should also mention the hundreds of (mostly North African) prostitutes on the military's payroll, who toured the territory in the *Bordels mobiles de campagne* (BMC).<sup>224</sup>

### Indochinese troops

Indochinese had served under the French long before 1945, usually as *tirailleurs*, and did so again soon after the latter's return. The French undertook early recruitment among minorities such as the Muong (of which only 1% became officers). From 1947 on it became an official practice to complement mostly European regiments and battalions with units raised in operational areas. The French referred to any local reinforcements (prior to the 1950s) as either *autochtones*,<sup>225</sup> *supplétifs*<sup>226</sup> or simply partisans. (The difference between such categories has never been entirely clear.<sup>227</sup>) Ideally, a regiment would feature one battalion of indigenous troops while a battalion

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 41-2.

<sup>220</sup> Legion of French volunteers against bolshevism.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 44 and R. Muelle, 'Le bataillon des réprouvés' in *Historia Spécial*, no. 28 and 34-9.

<sup>222</sup> Bodin, *Les combattants français face à la guerre d'Indochine*, 8. The two figures quoted refer to the years 1948 and 1953.

<sup>223</sup> It is not specified if these are yearly or cumulative figures.

<sup>224</sup> Mobile outdoor brothels. Rest of paragraph based on Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 131-140.

<sup>225</sup> Literally 'native'.

<sup>226</sup> 'Auxiliaries'.

<sup>227</sup> Dalloz, *Dictionnaire de la guerre d'Indochine*, 235-6.

would include one such company. Many were later transferred to the national armies of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.<sup>228</sup>

*Supplétifs* have been brought in connection with watch towers that later dotted the deltas. Partisans for their part, usually highlands minorities, came to enlist in so called *Groupelements de commandos mixtes aéroportés*<sup>229</sup> (GCMA). Employed in operations behind enemy lines (where they existed), this *maquis*<sup>230</sup> comprised up to 12,000 men at its peak.

With the escalation of the war in 1950/1 the French authorities, aided by US money and material, rushed the recruitment for and training of the national armies. Once deemed battle-fit, units were posted to more quiet sectors to free French, African and Foreign Legion troops for operations in hotter areas. In 1950 the Vietnamese army counted 50,000 regular troops, the Cambodian 6,000 and the Laotian 1,200. By January 1954 these figures had risen to 170,000 (plus 46,800 *supplétifs*), 16,600 (plus 2,900 *supplétifs*) and 20,000 (plus 2,900 *supplétifs*). Vietnam also built up a minuscule navy and air force.<sup>231</sup>

In addition, the French collaborated with the three southern sects, the Binh Xuyen, Cao Dai and Hoa Hao. All of them formed their own militia comprising several thousand men. So did Colonel Leroy, a French-Vietnamese, who ruled over 500,000 people in the southern region of Ben Tre and commanded the *Unités mobiles pour la défense des chrétientés*<sup>232</sup> (UMDC).<sup>233</sup>

## Manpower and human costs

Roughly 560,000 men served in Indochina throughout the whole war on the French/nationalist side. Of these 200,000 were of European<sup>234</sup> and 135,000 of African origin. Local troops constituted the rest. The authorities also threw into the battles 360 planes by 1954, plus a considerable naval fleet ranging from aircraft carriers to tiny river craft.

Dalloz has estimated that the expeditionary corps lost 20,000 French (among them 1,900 officers), 11,000 Legionnaires, 15,000 Africans and 46,000 Indochinese (not including *supplétifs* and partisans) in the conflict. Of the 21,220 French prisoners of war languishing in the notorious Viet Minh prison camps only 9,319 sick and starved were liberated by October 1954 – compared to only 9% of captured pro-French, indigenous troops. The civilian losses for Indochina and those of the Viet Minh have never truly been assessed but estimations go into the hundred thousands.<sup>235</sup>

<sup>228</sup> M. Windrow & M. Chappell, *Men-at-Arms series: The French Indochina War, 1946-54*, p. 13.

<sup>229</sup> 'Mixed air-borne commando groups'.

<sup>230</sup> Resistance modelled after the French version during WWII.

<sup>231</sup> 'Ministère de la Défense Nationale et des Forces Armées; développements des crédits', 11.3.1954, *Débats, Union Française*, LSE, 44 (R26) AUF 1.

<sup>232</sup> 'Mobile units for the defence of Christendom'.

<sup>233</sup> Dalloz, 'Des combattants indochinois contre le Vietminh' in *Les collections de l'histoire*, no. 23, 50-1.

<sup>234</sup> French and the various European nationalities serving with the Foreign Legion.

<sup>235</sup> Dalloz, *La guerre d'Indochine*, 251, Masson, *Histoire de l'armée française*, 406 and 410 and *Le Monde, Dossiers & Documents*, no.331, 2. Figures can vary considerably depending on sources.



## The French military after WWII

To better understand some of the difficulties in Indochina and to get a sense of the pool the CEFEQ could draw on it is helpful to consider the general situation of the French military following D-Day.

Upon France's liberation the authorities faced the formidable task of demobilising a large and very heterogeneous force amounting to 1.7 million men (and women). These included eight divisions contributing to the (re-)conquest of France and Germany, the lightly armed 1<sup>ère</sup>, 10<sup>e</sup> and 27<sup>e</sup> *Divisions alpines* of the *Forces françaises de l'intérieur* (FFI), three divisions of the *Forces de l'Atlantique*,<sup>236</sup> two large units earmarked for the CEFEQ, forty regional regiments, the police, *gardes mobiles*, the gendarmerie, 127 battalions of *sécurité* and pioneers attached to US forces, as well as African and Indochinese units (originally) stationed in the overseas territories. The air force (*Armée de l'air*) counted 140,000 men manning and supporting 700 mostly outdated planes. Due to its large-scale destruction the even smaller navy relied to a large extent on American and British vessels.

A report issued on June 4, 1945 foresaw a 'peace-time' force of twenty-one divisions or 770,000 men (plus 70,000 in the air force and 68,000 in the navy). Yet the maintenance of these forces and equipment absorbed 40% of the national revenue by 1946. In view of France's existing debt of 2,875 billion dollars<sup>237</sup> the army was reduced to 460,000 men, the air force to 67,000 and the navy to 55,000 until the end of 1946. This combination still cost France 140 billion francs while leaving a mere 130,000 men for the metropolitan defence. All personnel (much of it under-qualified) used for the most part material acquired and taken over from Britain, the US, Germany and Italy.<sup>238</sup> In an interview Defence Minister René Pleven outlined that, due to new global commitments, troop numbers would swell again to 905,000 by 1953 with military credits reaching 1,279 billion Francs. The Indochina War absorbed 26,5 % of officers and 42,2% of NCOs in the army alone (then roughly 420,000 men strong). The 215,000 troops needed in Southeast Asia left only 67,000 in the rest of the overseas territories.<sup>239</sup>

## Fusion, demobilisation, homogenisation and purges

The bulk of troops for the peace-time army was initially taken from the Free French, the *Armée d'Afrique*, the *Coloniale* and the resistance. Fusing these branches required consideration of the differing levels of training as well as combat and command experience. This posed particular challenges in the case of FFI officers, who often possessed little of either and were met with reservation from their regular colleagues. Of the FFI's 24,000 cadres 16,439 were channelled into

<sup>236</sup> Both forces constituted part of the resistance.

<sup>237</sup> Most of this were US credits. The debt quoted dates back to spring 1946.

<sup>238</sup> Masson, *Histoire de l'armée française*, 364-73.

<sup>239</sup> *Revue de défense nationale*, 9<sup>e</sup> année, tome XVI, January 1953, p. 93, Liddell Hart Archive.

the active military by 1945 and 4,054 into the reserve, sometimes after promotion from lower ranks.<sup>240</sup>

Their mental state and lack of fitness put a question mark behind the recall of 2,000 officers deported to concentration camps during WWII<sup>241</sup> and the 6,000 released from 'regular' German prison camps (Oflags).<sup>242</sup> On the other hand, a considerable number of officers quit the army following the announcement of cuts within the corps by 12,000 individuals as part of the general demobilisation. But as casualty rates in Indochina grew, many of those (often forcibly) released were re-integrated.<sup>243</sup>

Purges had already begun in North Africa after the allied landings and ended with the re-establishment of an independent French state. The authorities mainly targeted those who had actively obeyed Vichy orders, served alongside the Axis powers or failed to aid the resistance. This especially concerned Vichy's former high command plus openly pro-German forces such as the *Phalange africaine*. Officers purged but wishing to be re-instated had to explain their attitude and actions since June 1940.

Behind these draconic measures stood an official determination from 1947 on to rejuvenate the armed forces, particularly the officer corps. However, many professional officers accused the left (presumably behind the cuts) of taking revenge on the right's elite. D'Abzac-Épezy has maintained though that figures circulating at the time were often exaggerated. 658 army officers had actually been purged by May 1949, 12,679 demobilised, 604 had parted voluntarily, while 3,585 (of the FFI) and 1,134 others had been re-incorporated. The disengagements after the war concerned for the most part older NCOs, lieutenants and captains eligible for pensions.<sup>244</sup> Among them figured many who had hastily been recalled in the final months of the war either from the reserve or the FFI. Still, the author has admitted a lasting speculation surrounding the departures. For certain the arbitrariness, denunciations and tension accompanying the process left a bitter taste in military circles. On the other hand the relative leniency involved owed to the desire to figure among the victors in 1945 at the cost of maintaining an elitist force.<sup>245</sup>

The reduction in troop numbers went hand in hand with a degradation of service conditions. In comparison to (higher) civilian employments the salary of an army colonel fell from third to ninth place between 1945 and 1950. A French major earned two-thirds of his British counterpart.<sup>246</sup> Correspondingly entries into training institutions dropped while the proportion of officer cadets at St. Cyr coming from military families rose to 40% between 1945 and 1958. (Admittedly, this trend had already manifested itself in the 1930s.) On the eve of WWII the percentage of officers graduating from the *Grandes écoles* had shrunk from 52% to 36% compared with 1913. A quarter had come through the ranks and 9% from the reserve.<sup>247</sup>

<sup>240</sup> It is not entirely clear whether the quoted figures apply to the army, the air force and the navy. That said, officers in the latter two branches would have been few in the resistance.

<sup>241</sup> *Revue de la défense nationale*, 2<sup>e</sup> année, Sept. 1946, p. 400.

<sup>242</sup> Bodin, *La France et ses soldats*, 27.

<sup>243</sup> Masson, *Histoire de l'armée française*, 375.

<sup>244</sup> 8,536 between 1946 and 1947.

<sup>245</sup> C. d'Abzac-Épezy, 'L'épuration dans l'armée: mythe et réalité' in Forcade, Duhamel and Vial, *Militaires en République*, 667-686.

<sup>246</sup> Horne, *The French Army and Politics*, 74.

<sup>247</sup> Girardet, *La crise militaire française*, 18-19 and 41.

## Conscription

The authorities re-introduced conscription in 1946. Those French found healthy enough became eligible for military service on their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday although various nuances existed.<sup>248</sup> They served in France, Germany, Austria and North Africa. Born and naturalised French residing overseas (but not in North Africa or the mandated territories) served in their nearest units, which were usually part of the *Coloniale*. Conscription also concerned Algerian Muslims having become French citizens in 1947. In the case of native personnel, voluntary engagements and conscription alternated or complemented each other depending on needs. Habitually, governors fixed quotas and their subjects drew lots. Conscription for the national armies of Indochina was initiated in 1951 but was marred by corruption and avoidance.

The French government initially fixed the duration of mandatory military service at one year (two for Algerian Muslims) but extended it to eighteen months in 1950. After their service conscripts entered the reserve for twenty-seven years. They could be recalled, as happened in 1947 and 1956. If considered suitable, they joined the NCO and officer corps where they made up 15, 5% and 8, 5% respectively. The air force, more so than the navy, picked only those men who held specific diplomas or possessed otherwise relevant experience.

After the first call-up in 1946 conscripts accounted for 14, 3% of all forces combined. At the end of 1953 the percentage stood at 33, 8% and reached 59% in 1957. Yet even during the Algerian War the left's vision of a popular army did not materialise. At the beginning of the war professional soldiers made up 52,1% of all army personnel. Imperial enthusiasts were equally disappointed as the three forces remained largely French. Their percentage in the army, which received the largest share of non-Europeans, lingered around 60%. Asians accounted for a mere 5% at the end of 1946 (excluding *supplétifs*).<sup>249</sup>

## European defence and nationalism

Due to European commitments and turbulences overseas the French military could never devote all necessary resources to the Indochina War. That said, the European (Military) Cooperation, envisioned by the signatories of the Brussels Pact, faltered in March 1948. But the creation of and French involvement in NATO the next year required high military spending and troop provisions. Thankfully it also brought American aid through the Marshall Plan and the Mutual Defence Assistance Act. For France the latter resulted in \$555 million for defence purposes alone.

While the military greatly appreciated the assistance it was well aware of the resulting dependence and additional expenditures. Despite the latter the country was unable to provide the

<sup>248</sup> Miners were excluded as were sons or brothers of those who 'had died for France'. Students and apprentices could defer their service.

<sup>249</sup> Section based on General Staff, *Handbook of the French Army* (1940), 155, Carles, *Des millions des soldats inconnus*, 35-43, Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa*, 7, 244-91 and 333-64 and Dalloz, *Dictionnaire de la guerre d'Indochine*, 16-7.

twenty modern divisions promised for the defence of Europe. The reason lay in the crippling combination of reconstruction, modernisation, re-armament and the Indochina War.

After 1949 the latter turned into the military's major focus. The reason behind this was as much political and economic as psychological. The 1940 armistice and the Japanese coup of 1945 had instilled in the French government and military a strong desire for a return to the old, more grandiose days. In addition, even someone less colonially-minded like de Gaulle knew that without its empire France would only be a mid-ranked power. Furthermore, the country had considerably invested in Indochina's infrastructure and left a strong cultural imprint, not least its 30,000 or so settlers. Like Malaya, the territory also functioned as a major rubber-producer while also representing the rice chamber of Southeast Asia. Finally, and as we will see later on, Indochina held strategic importance in the Cold War, not least because it bordered (eventually) Maoist China. Yet France's embroilment in Southeast Asia led the US administration to conclude in 1950 that France could no longer constitute the cornerstone of a European defence. It turned towards Germany and Italy despite vehement French protests.<sup>250</sup>

Gallic indignation had already done little to postpone British-induced independence to the mandated Lebanon and Syria during WWII. Still, departure did not ensue until 1946 following the suppression of a revolt.<sup>251</sup> Further to the west security forces killed 6,000 Algerians after French settlers had been slaughtered by locals during the Sétif massacre in May 1945. It would turn out to be a prelude to a war involving up to 2.5 million French soldiers (among them many conscripts). It would also spill over into France, lead to a failed military putsch in 1961, cost up to 400,000 Algerian lives and ended with the exodus of between 600,000 and 800,000 European settlers as well as over 100,000 *harkis*.<sup>252</sup>

The Malagasy uprising between 1947 and 1949 again caused several ten thousand mostly indigenous casualties. It tied down roughly 18,000 French, African and Foreign Legion troops despite poorly armed opposition. Meanwhile, *Afrique occidentale française* (AOF)<sup>253</sup> and *Afrique équatoriale française* (AEF)<sup>254</sup> remained calmer. This owed in part to the moderating influence but clever negotiating of nationalist leaders like Senegal's Léopold Senghor. Where they broke out, protests centred on income and working conditions of the ever more numerous wage earners. On a few occasions police and white settlers dispersed demonstrations by simply shooting into the crowds, as happened at the port of Douala (Cameroon) in 1945 and in Dimbokro (Ivory Coast) in 1950. But the only organised armed struggle would occur in Cameroon between 1956 and 1958.

The protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia saw more of the latter during the 1950s. Yet much nationalist pressure was applied via the UN, the Arab League and the Non-Aligned Movement while French residents, the monarchies and nationalist parties bargained. Even so, the mountainous interior but also centres of population saw uprisings and demonstrations, in which the police, soldiers and white settlers were at times targeted. In Morocco Berbers and Arabs

<sup>250</sup> Bulk of both paragraphs from Masson, *Histoire de l'armée française*, 378-90.

<sup>251</sup> R. Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of Overseas Expansion* (1996), p. 276.

<sup>252</sup> Algerian auxiliaries.

<sup>253</sup> Comprising Senegal, Mauritania, French Sudan, Niger, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Dahomey, Upper Volta (after 1948) and indirectly the mandated territory of Togo.

<sup>254</sup> Covering the French Congo, Oubangui-Chari, Gabon, Chad and indirectly the mandated territory of Cameroon.

turned on each other. Security forces and settlers on the other hand showed little restraint when confronted by demonstrators. During the Casablanca Massacre on December 7 and 8, 1952 they shot scores of Moroccans.

Accorded the status of either *Départements d'outre-mer* (DOM) or *Territoires d'outre-mer* (TOM) under the 1946 constitution, the financially dependent islands in the West Indies, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific were spared such upheaval thanks to gradual administrative decentralisation, political representation in Paris and cultural autonomy.<sup>255</sup>

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Three paragraphs based on Thomas, Moore & Butler, *Crises of Empire*, 152-181 and 216-269.

### Chapter 3: “Part of a wider Soviet-inspired drive” – British soldiers’ views on the Malayan Emergency and insurgents

In his 1957 report for the War Office<sup>256</sup> director of operations, General Sir Roger Bower, described the origins and changing strategy of the communist guerrillas as follows:

The Malayan Communist Party’s (MCP) campaign in Malaya is part of a wider Soviet-inspired drive to obtain control of what is strategically and economically one of the most important areas in South-East Asia. Its aim is to overthrow the Malayan Government and to set up in its place a Communist-controlled Peoples’ Democratic Republic. [...] The formation and official recognition of the Malayan Peoples’ Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) in 1941 gave it an army which was not completely disbanded in 1945 and which became the instrument with which it could pursue its aim by force. [...] In June 1948, on the instructions of the Cominform issued at two conferences in Calcutta four months earlier, the MCP started a campaign of murder, sabotage and terrorism designed to paralyse the Government and develop into armed revolution. [...] By mid-1949 the leaders had realised that a quick decision was not possible. [...] They modified their methods with a view to wearing down the Government and in due course dominating selected centres of population. These they planned to group into liberated areas where civil administration could be taken over and a regular army built up [...] In October 1951 the MCP [...] directed that operations should be confined to military and para-military targets in the rural areas and that every effort must be made to infiltrate into and conduct subversive activities in all walks of life in the centres of population. [Following a series of setbacks between 1951 and 1955] They realised that their attempt to seize control of the country by force had failed. [Since then] The MCP have adopted a ‘wait and see policy’, in the hope that when the Federation attains full Independence, they will be allowed to leave the jungle [...] to lead a United Front of left wing parties.

Much further down the pecking order National Serviceman and 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant<sup>257</sup> Oliver Crawford agreed, musing in his memoirs:

... both sides in Malaya could feel the threat of China [...]. The terrorists drew their inspiration from Peking Radio, and the number of terrorist incidents mounted noticeably after the fall of Dien Bien Phu. In Malaya we felt the French were fighting in the same war as ourselves, and at the worst time of the Indo-China crisis [...] there would have been little surprise if British battalions had suddenly found themselves sailing from Singapore to Indo-China. Like the terrorists, we felt both wars were the same war. From that, it was a small step to seeing this struggle as part of the same global struggle that had now erupted at different times in Korea and Formosa, Indo-China and Malaya, Greece and Berlin. Kennan’s ‘Containment of Communism’, as a phrase, seemed to hold particular meaning for us in Malaya. Yet no-one could say we fought this war merely as an ideological war. Perhaps the terrorists did: their aim

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<sup>256</sup> NA, WO 106/5990.

<sup>257</sup> Where military branches are not specified soldiers served in the infantry.

was to establish a Communist Government composed of themselves [...]. But we did not fight them just because they were Communists. [...]. [They] were terrorists. They carried weapons. They wore uniforms. They killed.<sup>258</sup>

For Harold Kirk, a regular gunner, the communists “were intimidating all and sending [them] into the communist way of life.” Unlike the officers cited above, Kirk came from a farming family and had enjoyed only a very short education.<sup>259</sup>

Given such opinions, it will be maintained in this chapter that the majority of (former) British servicemen included in this study – provided they have given it any thought at all – have put the Malayan Emergency not in the context of decolonisation but in that of the Cold War. Similarly, they have labelled the insurgents they fought as (misguided) ‘communist terrorists’ rather than nationalists, thereby following the official terminology of the time. The roots of the conflict then lay in the spread of Marxist thinking in Malaya rather than in social, political and economic triggers. Only a minority have identified Singapore’s fall and the ensuing Japanese occupation during WWII, administrative failures by the returning British, economic upheavals, ethnic tensions and Britain’s fading influence in the world as causes for upheaval. A few advocates of such causes have suffered psychological or physical scars during and after the conflict, prompting them to question their involvement in Malaya. Others gained access to intelligence information during the emergency or were briefed in unusual frankness on Malaya’s economic importance. A small number had closer links with the territory due to birth, childhood or relatives residing there. And one or two stayed on after independence thereby gaining additional insight.

This chapter outlines views of the majority and minority while also explaining how the relative uniformity might have developed.

### **Influences that shaped opinions**

Andrew Thompson has held that peoples’ origins impinged on their view of empire.<sup>260</sup> Bernard Porter has gone further in maintaining that the British upper classes were generally more aware of empire and decolonisation than the middle or working classes. Such a take would allow for a class analysis of popular imperialism.<sup>261</sup> It is therefore possible that many officers, who even by 1945 were habitually drawn from the upper classes, linked the emergency with the end of empire prior to their departure to Malaya. The sources used for this project do indeed suggest that class and education played into military perceptions. Yet backgrounds have not necessarily divided (ex-) servicemen into a camp also connecting the conflict with decolonisation and focusing on the

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<sup>258</sup> Crawford, *The Door Marked Malaya*, 181. We should not assume that all National Servicemen/subalterns shared his opinion and possessed the same understanding of international relations. In fact, very few of those filling out questionnaires for this research professed any knowledge of the Indochina War. Neither have memoir-writers quoted it much.

<sup>259</sup> Questionnaire, 2.6.2007.

<sup>260</sup> Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?*, 241.

<sup>261</sup> Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 311.

Cold War. But it is certainly not a coincidence that many (former) soldiers graduating from public schools have portrayed the conflict in more complexity than their lower middle and working class colleagues. Equally, those deviating from the traditional Cold War take on the conflict have spoken and written very articulately in testimonies. On the other hand, more thoroughly educated veterans have at times offered fairly clear-cut explanations. Among them has figured Peter Leigh, a National Serviceman, platoon commander and intelligence officer. Prior to his tour he had attended a public school and later Sandhurst. Asked about the task at hand, he answered that it consisted in stopping “Malaya (from) being taken over by the communists”.<sup>262</sup> Former corporal and conscript, Leonard Spicer, for his part quoted ‘working class’ as background. This did not stop him from attending evening classes and then university later on in life nor from writing a book about the emergency.<sup>263</sup> In regard to above question he replied somewhat cautiously: “We were given to understand we were protecting the interest of the UK against a ruthless, well-armed enemy...”<sup>264</sup> His response has to be seen in the context of the unusually forthright briefing he received from his Australian commander at the time, who highlighted the economic importance of Malaya.<sup>265</sup> Spicer’s caution probably also stems from the research for his own book. Crucially though, he and Leigh have not fundamentally questioned the roots and nature of the insurgency as outlined by the authorities.

Part of the reason why (former) British combatants have classified the emergency as a Cold War theatre is that they have been, of course, largely correct. It was the MCP and its armed wing, the MNLA, which led, planned and carried out the insurgency. Their aim consisted in establishing a socialist state modelled after Mao’s China or the USSR. Throughout their struggle they maintained relations with other communist movements although external assistance did for the most part not result in the provision of supplies and training. In this context Chin Peng attributed the decision to take up arms to a meeting with the Australian communist Laurence Sharkley<sup>266</sup> and to an increasingly assertive clamp-down by the colonial authorities. Sharkley confessed during a meeting in Singapore that his party ‘eliminated’ strike breakers. This contradicted Bower’s assumption (subsequently taken up by many writers) that the MCP reacted to direct or indirect signals from the Cominform conference in Calcutta, to which the MCP had actually not been invited.<sup>267</sup>

Bower’s report apart, it is often difficult to ascertain whether soldierly reasoning has been borne out of personal experiences, government propaganda, the later study of literature or discussions. For example, a former National Serviceman, E. G. Guest, commented that: “During my time in Malaya I rarely encountered anyone who had any sympathy for their [the guerrillas] cause.”<sup>268</sup> But the same veteran confessed that he had very little contact with the population, which puts his

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<sup>262</sup> Questionnaire, 26.9.2007.

<sup>263</sup> *The Suffolks in Malaya* (1998).

<sup>264</sup> Questionnaire, 14.5.2007.

<sup>265</sup> Interview with Spicer’s colleague, Tony Rodgers, on 21.8.2006.

<sup>266</sup> Secretary-general of the Australian Communist Party.

<sup>267</sup> Ward, Miraflor and Chin Peng, *My Side of History*, 201-5.

<sup>268</sup> Questionnaire, 28.8.2007.



assessment in a different perspective. As it was, many British servicemen never spotted, let alone spoke to an insurgent, either.<sup>269</sup>

It helps to recall the mood in the western world in order to understand the agreement between the higher and lower military strata in regard to the Malayan Emergency. Throughout the conflict international developments appeared frightening to anyone who did not favour socialist rule. Multiparty rule had given way to communist regimes across Eastern Europe. Uprisings in Germany and Poland were brutally crushed with Hungary and Czechoslovakia to follow. Berlin suffered a blockade for several months in 1948. War-torn Greece was on the brink of turning communist while Turkey came under massive Soviet pressure. US and allied troops were badly outnumbered in Europe in relation to the communist block. In China Mao's forces relentlessly squeezed the Kuomintang out of China until the latter collapsed completely. Further to the south and west the French rapidly lost ground in Indochina until they, too, conceded defeat. And in Korea communist troops proved equal to their UN opposition. Worse, many of the newly independent states in the Third World leaned towards socialism.<sup>270</sup> In regard to Southeast Asia in particular, *The Times*' editor-in-chief found disturbing patterns:

Most of the rich lands [of South East Asia] are suffering Communist upheavals; most of them contain large Chinese minorities, and the Communists among those Chinese look first to the example and practice of Mao Tse-Tung. [...] The seriousness of the outbreaks has varied, but everywhere the tactics have been identical, aiming at economic chaos and political confusion to undermine organized authority and to prepare the way, if possible, for Communist regimes.<sup>271</sup>

Not all servicemen read *The Times*. But newspapers carrying similar editorials and stories were read in British homes and dropped to troops in the Malayan jungle. They helped to reinforce widely held beliefs. Former Royal Marine, Donald Mott, saw the danger not only in Asia but also at home when he summarised: "The Cold War had become a major threat to [the] UK in [the] late 50s."<sup>272</sup>

Nonetheless, international developments alone cannot explain the common worry about a communist takeover. It is necessary to consider the analysis and portrayal of actual developments. Susan Carruthers has depicted in great detail how communication experts on the

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<sup>269</sup> Ex-gunner Leo Campbell for instance confessed that he never actually had any contact with insurgents, neither during skirmishes or otherwise. See Walker, *Six Campaigns*, 36.

<sup>270</sup> P. M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (1989), pp. 373-95.

<sup>271</sup> 23.11.1948.

<sup>272</sup> Questionnaire, 26.9.2007.

spot and their superiors in London<sup>273</sup> manipulated public opinion. They were largely successful in their efforts despite the uneasy relationship between the British military and the press. Even so, the Colonial and Foreign Offices quarrelled for some time over the extent and intensity of the conflict as well as over the enemy to be fought. They eventually agreed on the need to paint a picture of a wider communist scheme. Part of the ensuing communication strategy lay in denying the existence of a nationalist movement in Malaya and in emphasising the largely Chinese character of the MCP. Equally, they sought to heighten tensions between Moscow, China and Southeast Asian communists by claiming that the MCP and MNLA received their directions not from China but Moscow. At the same time, British communication officers did their best to stress that the colonial power did not suppress critical voices per se but intended to work with moderates towards Malayan independence. Carruthers has further underlined that throughout the whole communication campaign terminology played a crucial part and largely produced the right stories. This was so despite the relative absence of censorship outside the Federation and Singapore.<sup>274</sup> That said, where the desired results could not be obtained, the British government and administration did not shy away from curbing the flow of information.<sup>275</sup>

By 1952 the official version of the Malayan conflict also found its way into a handbook on the emergency.<sup>276</sup> Yet none of the veterans considered, who served from that date on, have mentioned receiving and reading the latter. But it was probably distributed among senior military staff, administrators and the press. On the final pages readers could find a questions and answers section. The first of these read: "Are the communist bandits leading a national liberation movement?" The answer went:

No. They are a small minority seeking to impose their ideas against the wishes of the great majority in the country. They are attempting to do this by violent means. Their violence consists of intimidation, extortion and murder. The doctrines, aims and techniques of the Malayan Communist Party are implacably Stalinist in conception and execution.

<sup>273</sup> The PR campaign in Malaya originated from and was influenced by a considerable number of departments and individuals, both in Britain and Malaya. The Colonial and Foreign Offices dictated direction and policy of information used in Malaya. The Department of Public Relations with a staff of 200 and headed by J. N. McHugh prepared means and content. In Singapore John Rayner directed a Regional Information Office and regularly met with the local public relations secretary, George Thompson. Lieutenant-General Briggs was not satisfied with their output though so that he eventually set up additional bodies, namely the Information Department and the Emergency Information Service. In addition, the eventual director of the BBC, Hugh Carleton Greene, was sent to Malaya to improve the propaganda efforts. Templer later ordered the merger of the two offices into the Department of Information and appointed Alec Peterson, formerly part of Force 136, as its director. See Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, 90-95.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 72-127.

<sup>275</sup> In a lengthy exchange of correspondence between the War Office and the colonial administration for instance it was discussed whether the latter should continue restricting the flow of information to the communist *Daily Worker*. London maintained that the practice should be upheld. The newspaper had challenged the method but the War Office had defended it on the ground that the former's correspondents could not be trusted. Government representatives even advised the administration not to pretend to have forgotten to send copies to the newspaper but that it was "ok not to forward them at all". Archival records list eight occasions on which this occurred. Also included is a list of options available to the administration when deciding what (not) to publish: explaining priority of national security over freedom of information, clerical errors, refusal to publish information without explanation or agreement to forward press releases. See 'Daily Worker: 'issue of 'D' notices and reporting restrictions', Sept. 1951-Aug. 1954, NA, WO 258/124. Journalists of other newspapers experienced difficulties, too, when dealing with the military and colonial administration. The relationship between Templer and some correspondents was particularly tense. See again Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, 104-9.

<sup>276</sup> *Handbook to Malaya and the Emergency*, Public Relations Office, Singapore, May 1952, LSE 42 (2631).

It appears as if these ideas trickled down the hierarchy as most (ex-)military judgements have featured in aspects of the above statement.

Yet this kind of official dissemination was rare. Few servicemen received any meaningful information on the conflict other than purely technical matters involving jungle warfare. Critical questions about the Malayan malaise were not encouraged, either. One finds little evidence in the sources for discussion sessions within battalions, companies or platoons.<sup>277</sup> Raymond Hill, at the time a Royal Marine, remembered only being instructed to rid the country of communism.<sup>278</sup> Another veteran, ex-dragoon guard Noel Baptiste, later expressed his astonishment about the lack of psychological preparation. He maintained that soldiers were not told why they were in Malaya and what they were supposed to do.<sup>279</sup> On the other hand, few seem to have actively sought information, perhaps because they did not want to unduly attract the attention of their superiors. As former private White commented: "Way back then one didn't ask awkward questions. It was enough to get through a day and survive."<sup>280</sup>

This approach derived to some extent from decisions made in London. After WWII new regular and conscripted recruits initially had to attend two hours per week of current affairs and citizenship discussions throughout their training. But demobilisation, economic difficulties and the beginning of National Service resulted in younger and less knowledgeable instructors having to teach less concerned intakes. Budgets were continuously cut and departments closed while the overall number of sessions decreased. In parallel former left-wing members of the army's education committees left to start civilian careers. As the forces became more marginal within British society, the left's hopes of social engineering – so dearly held during WWII – faded. At the same time the heads of the War Office and the director of army education, Bellenger (followed by Shinwell) and Lloyd, feared that the end of the coalition government would result in politically biased instructions.<sup>281</sup> As a consequence, they decided to produce their own information material from 1952 on. It contained more technical and therefore neutral issues, such as NATO's aims and set-up. As MacKenzie has summed up: "The educational ferment of the war years had faded away, to be replaced by a harsh, utilitarian view of what it was the soldier needed to know."<sup>282</sup>

However, servicemen's relative ignorance in regard to the situation in Malaya also had other causes. WWII severely interrupted education. Even after 1945 financial strains on families frequently led to an early end to the schooling producing a generation with often scant knowledge of international affairs. Trevor Royle has pointed out that four years after the end of WWII 84% of the National Service intake had an educational standard of elementary school to illiteracy. Six years later still only 10% of new recruits had made it to grammar school. Prior to the call-up the vast majority had ended up in secondary modern school where they dropped out at the minimum

<sup>277</sup> In contrast, Norman Horton, who served as a regular sergeant and signaller in Borneo after Malaya's independence, maintained that he was informed about the the political background of the fighting and his tasks. See questionnaire and e-mail conversation, 1.6 and 4.7.2007.

<sup>278</sup> Questionnaire, 9.9.2007.

<sup>279</sup> Interview, IWM, 10107, 3.11.1986.

<sup>280</sup> [www.britains-smallwars.com/malaya/windo.htm](http://www.britains-smallwars.com/malaya/windo.htm).

<sup>281</sup> Interestingly Lloyd's counterparts in the air force and navy were less concerned.

<sup>282</sup> S. P. MacKenzie, *Politics and Military Morale: Current Affairs and Citizenship Education in the British Army, 1914-1950* (1992), pp. 191-220 (quote: p. 220).

age of 15.<sup>283</sup> Dennis Ryan, a National Serviceman and wireless operator in Malaya, remembered his school years as follows: "We weren't quite educated. We lived near a grammar school but I never went to one. [...] We'd been through to war. We had a rough time. The family life was up and down. You know, we weren't very rich. [...] To me it [National Service] was just another job virtually. I just came and we [...] went out to Malaya. I didn't even know where Malaya was." In light of such ignorance, offering Ryan a choice of posting proved pointless, as he himself indirectly admitted:

I was with the Essex Regiment and they wanted volunteers to go... well, they named it volunteers... to the Betton Hearts or the Suffolk Regiment. At that time the Betton Hearts were going to Trieste and the Suffolk Regiment [...] was in Malaya. And being educated like I was, I thought Trieste was in the desert. So I didn't fancy that at all. I volunteered to go to the Suffolk Regiment with the first battalion who were then in Malaya.<sup>284</sup>

This educational deficiency also reduced the knowledge of empire. Porter has referred to polls conducted in 1948 in which few people questioned could name a single colony. Likewise, no-one could explain the difference between the latter and a dominion.<sup>285</sup>

Other than poor schooling and limited briefings there is also a traditional reason for soldiers' complying stance: Ever since the English civil wars the British Army has deliberately abstained from politics – or so its representatives have claimed. Hugh Strachan has held that in exchange for sufficient funds, privileged access to civilian decision makers and protection from all-too curious public enquiries, the British military has largely left political decisions to civilians. Such battles have instead been confined to regimental issues, i.e. the defence of units when faced with amalgamation or outright dissolution.<sup>286</sup> Commanders might privately have cast doubt on political strategies. If prompted, they might even have spelled out those thoughts in the presence of high ranking civilian administrators and politicians. Yet in public they have remained more or less silent, certainly in the case of Malaya.<sup>287</sup> It is only logical that this attitude has permeated other ranks, too – at least until the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns.

So far, we can deduce that (ex-)servicemen have had little reason to deviate from the official line on the emergency and the insurgents. Studying some of the academic literature on the conflict and decolonisation in general though one wonders if the international context of the 1950s could

<sup>283</sup> Royle, *The Best Years of Their Lives*, 60.

<sup>284</sup> Interview, IWM, 18006, 5.5.1998.

<sup>285</sup> G. K. Evens, *Public Opinion on Colonial Affairs: A Survey Made in May and June 1948 for the Colonial Office* (1948). Quoted in Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 267.

<sup>286</sup> Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army*, 263-71. The author has further argued that British politicians and generals have often developed rather warm relationships in which one supported and defended the other. This is certainly true of General Harding and High-Commissioner Gurney. When the former left Malaya in 1950. The latter thanked him in a letter saying: "I cannot really express adequately my own sense of gratitude to your clear thinking and ability to put back on the rails a machine that so often shows signs of getting off them. By this I do not mean the Army but this combined administration with its balances and priorities and armchair experts." Papers of Field Marshall Lord Harding, 1994, Imperial War Museum (documents), accession number 5568 (box 96/40/1).

<sup>287</sup> Deviations from the official line did occur but were not necessarily intentioned. At a press conference in April 1950 Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Briggs hinted at the existence of a civil war in Malaya. And while the government still spoke of bandits he already referred to them as communists. See Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, 83.

not have led to other military perceptions. Anthony Stockwell has indicated that evidence for a communist plot in Malaya was lacking at a time when Whitehall, convinced by MacDonald, made it official. The commissioner-general for Southeast Asia also pressed for a ban of the MCP despite the fact that general lawlessness had been prevalent in Malaya throughout the 1920s and resurfaced in 1945. Months after High-Commissioner Gent had declared an emergency staff members admitted in private that proof of a communist conspiracy was still wanting. This remained the case until the first communist directives were intercepted and captured rebels interrogated. The only aspects security officials could point to before these successes were publications of the Malayan Communist Party, the USSR's overly large embassy in Bangkok and calls for armed rebellion at the Calcutta conference in 1948.<sup>288</sup>

Troubles could well have come from other sources. Various Muslim movements and parties, such as Hizbul Muslimin, the Malay Nationalist Party, the youth movement PETA, the Peasants Front and unions proved frequently more active and aggressive than the MCP, particularly in the months preceding the declaration of the emergency. Interestingly, members of these groups could have been defined either as radical Muslims or communists as their leaders attempted to make the two ideologies compatible. Furthermore, most of these movements interacted with and supported each other to some degree despite clashes in the past.<sup>289</sup>

Apart from these rumblings in Malaya, alert spectators could have noticed events elsewhere in the empire. Frank Furedi has highlighted the sense of despair within the British government in view of imperial pressures during the 1940s and 1950s. If they went unnoticed among the wider British population educated colonial subjects certainly took notice. Gloom had already started spreading with the fall of Singapore – widely described as the worst military disaster in British imperial history. 1948 proved a particularly bad year with the Accra Riots in February, upheavals in Baghdad, increasing pressure from the Zikist movement in Nigeria, labour unrest in the West Indies, the declaration of the Malayan Emergency and the hastened British departure from Burma and Palestine. All the while governors in the rest of the colonial empire reported tensions and violence on a weekly basis.

For the first time the Colonial Office and administration no longer held a monopoly on information. News of one hotspot frequently led to the outbreak of others. What's worse, the length and costs of the various conflicts undermined the belief in Britain's ability to get a grip. Officials often retorted to certain measures simply to catch breath and gain time.<sup>290</sup>

Why then were most servicemen at the time seemingly unaware of the issues Furedi and Stockwell have raised? Do government propaganda, the Cold War, inadequate schooling or military traditions suffice as explanations? Or did ordinary servicemen simply not care enough about the state of empire just as the majority of British might not have? If, according to Porter, empire had never mattered much for the majority of civilians (and soldiers) then perhaps decolonisation didn't either. Alternatively, people accepted the latter as inevitable or even

<sup>288</sup> A. J. Stockwell, 'A widespread and long-concocted plot to overthrow government in Malaya?' *The Origins of the Malayan Emergency*, in Holland, *Emergencies and Disorder*, 66-88.

<sup>289</sup> Bayly & Harper, *Forgotten Wars*, 417-9.

<sup>290</sup> F. Furedi, 'Creating a Breathing Space: The Political Management of Colonial Emergencies', in Holland, *Emergencies and Disorder*, 89-106.

desirable. Porter has argued that the British public largely supported Indian independence while the Suez campaign proved fairly unpopular. The majority of (interested) British accepted the official version that development and independence had always been the goal for Britain's overseas territories and subjects. Part of the acceptance stemmed from the conviction that the Commonwealth would maintain the family ties.<sup>291</sup> (One could counter that such acquiescence did not extend to all sections of politics, particularly not when white settler communities in Africa were concerned.<sup>292</sup>) If this is the case then why should British servicemen have differed in their attitudes from the rest of the ostensibly apathetic population? One might hold that fighting in a territory far away could have sensitised or even radicalised some, as happened in WWI or II. But how were soldiers posted to Malaya supposed to suddenly develop revolutionary thoughts if all they saw were dense jungle, a few scattered villages and maybe a dead or surrendered communist rebel? Locals, who could have initiated discussions, were often miles away.

Even if some soldiers showed an interest in empire before their spell in Malaya, they were likely to gain mixed impressions from developments. Those, especially regular soldiers, who had been posted to other colonies prior to their arrival in Malaya, would not have necessarily concluded that social and nationalist aspirations threatened to bring about the end of empire. Indeed, if stationed in Africa during the 1940s and 1950s they could easily have construed that Britain was actually tightening its imperial screws. That was certainly the case in Central and East Africa where the Labour government intensively experimented with agricultural and administrative projects in order to turn the areas into new dominions.<sup>293</sup>

With the emergency lasting throughout the 1950s Martin Lynn's work on the decade needs to be considered, too. He has cautioned against perceiving decolonisation as a process with a clear beginning and a foreseeable end. According to him, British politicians certainly did not envision the rapid retreat in the 1960s. In fact, the situation ten years prior looked much more promising than it had at the end of WWII. The empire still offered lucrative markets and plentiful resources. It all encouraged British governments to hold on to as much as they could and to make their voices heard in world affairs. First unexpected cracks did not appear until the Suez crisis which lead to Macmillan's 'cost-benefit' analysis.<sup>294</sup>

As it was though, the majority of British conscripts and even many regulars had neither travelled much within the empire nor had they read much about it prior to their tour in Malaya. Consequently, they could not necessarily fathom that Britain's colonial record in Southeast Asia was not an entirely solid one. Little wonder then that few connected the emergency with the general British (and European) difficulty to protect and develop colonies before, during and after WWII. Equally few concluded from this that many colonial subjects had lost confidence in their masters. Asked about Britain's standing in the world after 1945, most veterans consulted felt that their country still represented a major power at the time. The afore-mentioned E. G. Guest for

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<sup>291</sup> Porter, *The Absent-minded Imperialists*, 18-9.

<sup>292</sup> See for instance Lord Salisbury's crusade against MacMillan over Suez, Cyprus and Africa in S. J. Ball, 'Banquo's Ghost: Lord Salisbury, Harold Macmillan, and the High Politics of Decolonization, 1957-1963', *20<sup>th</sup> Century British History*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2005, pp. 74-102.

<sup>293</sup> J. M. MacKenzie, 'The Persistence of Empire in Metropolitan Culture', in Ward, *British Culture and the End of Empire*, 26-7.

<sup>294</sup> Lynn, *The British Empire in the 1950s*, 1-15.

instance remarked: "It appeared to me that Britain was a major power striving to maintain the democratic system in Europe and the Far East."<sup>295</sup>

Even decades later and following some very critical publications on the subject, only a handful of former servicemen have underlined Britain's omissions and failures in Malaya as well as their possible impact. Several have acknowledged that Britain brought thousands of Chinese and Indians to the colony to work on plantations or mines but they have not always deduced that this created an explosive social landscape. Only one or two have pointed to the lack of land rights and citizenship or the psychological distance of the British administration, which so marked the lives of ordinary Chinese.<sup>296</sup> A handful hinted at the reverberations of Singapore's fall in 1942.<sup>297</sup> Such findings should not serve as a late criticism. But they confirm the perpetuation of the Cold War theory on the one hand and a fairly positive image of the British Empire among veterans on the other hand.

This in turn raises the question of literature consumed by veterans. Likely (and cited) targets include colleagues' memoirs or analyses by regimental historians.<sup>298</sup> Both sets of authors are unlikely to have delved on the more problematic aspects of Britain's rule in Malaya in great length because their interest have naturally lied in the military facets. One book mentioned and recommended in correspondence is Donald Mackay's *The Malayan Emergency, 1948-60*. The author has stressed the shattering moral effect of Singapore's fall on Southeast Asians and for British colonial prestige. In parallel, he has highlighted the problematic attitude of British military, administrative and business personnel returning to Malaya in 1945, many of whom were hell-bent on turning back the clock. Moreover, he has described the dire state of the Malayan infrastructure and economy at the time, the colonial crackdowns on industrial strikers and protesters, the failed Malayan Union and the glaring gap between ordinary Chinese and British officials.<sup>299</sup> These are five crucial roots of the insurgency that have rarely emerged in military witness accounts then or now.

Richard Clutterbuck's<sup>300</sup> take on the emergency also features on many websites or memoirs and has undoubtedly influenced later writers and veterans alike. In this context it appears at times as if many authors have taken up the stances of their predecessors or colleagues, thus reinforcing the concept of a purely communist-inspired uprising. Anthony Short, himself a participant in the emergency,<sup>301</sup> represents one of the first authors who took a more complex and ultimately inquisitive view. One has to ask why nobody has challenged, or at least supplemented, the governmental line until Short's publication. Does this reflect a belated response to MacKenzie's

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<sup>295</sup> Questionnaire, 28.8.2007.

<sup>296</sup> For criticism of British administrative delays and an insight into Chinese attitudes see A.J. Stockwell, 'British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya, 1942-52' in *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xiii, 1 (1984), pp. 68-87 and L. W. Pye, *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya: It's Social and Political Meaning* (1956), p. 205. Pye was an American political scientist, who conducted many interviews with surrendered guerrillas to find out what had led them to join the MCP and why they had capitulated. For land rights and citizenship see Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, 174 and Short, *The Communist Insurrection in Malaya*, 179-80.

<sup>297</sup> Karl Hack has described how the wobbly morale and deserting within Australian, British and Indian units during the Japanese attack contrasted with the grit of the Malay Regiment and Chinese volunteers. The latter and their civilian counterparts could certainly not help questioning the value of British rule. See Hack & Rettig, *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia*, 256.

<sup>298</sup> The list published on the NMBVA's website offers some insight. See: [www.nmbva.co.uk](http://www.nmbva.co.uk).

<sup>299</sup> Mackay, *The Malayan Emergency*, 11-7.

<sup>300</sup> The author worked in the director of operations' staff holding the rank of lieutenant-colonel.

<sup>301</sup> Born in Singapore he experienced the emergency as a National Serviceman.

notion of a third and decisive, imperial implosion?<sup>302</sup> Or was Short simply the first to deal with the emergency after Britain's decision to abandon its presence east of Suez? Timing could be important. It is worth highlighting that most of the Imperial War Museum's interviews with veterans were conducted in the 1980s and 1990s. That said, many memoirs and internet testimonies have appeared in the past few years. Questionnaires or interviews prepared and conducted by myself are even more recent. Time appears to have altered little if one compares official sources at the time with recent declarations from ex-servicemen. The previously quoted *Handbook to Malaya and the Emergency* for instance described Britain's role in Malaya (and indirectly the patterns of decolonisation) in another Q&A section as such:

Question: What is the justification for the British remaining in Malaya?

Answer: The Colony of Singapore and the Settlements of Penang and Malacca are British territories. Elsewhere in Malaya the British are there by agreement with the Rulers of the Malay States. The Malay States have voluntarily accepted British protection and advice, and it is the declared aim of the British Government to guide Malaya to responsible self-government within the Commonwealth and to ensure for the country freedom from oppression from any quarter. This freedom is not yet assured. A premature withdrawal would jeopardise the security, well-being and liberty of these people for whom Britain has responsibilities.<sup>303</sup>

The tone is similar in news features from the 1940s and 1950s. One such film shows the last minutes of British rule in Malaya and the celebrations accompanying them. When hundreds shouted 'Merdeka' (independence) in Kuala Lumpur's racing stadium the commentator asked: "Was ever independence achieved with such goodwill?" Meanwhile at the celebration, Malaya's first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman promised: "We shall always remember the assistance we have received from Great Britain down our long path to nationhood."<sup>304</sup>

### Alternative takes on the emergency

Assessments deviating from the official line have often carried a sense of inevitability and pride but also a shade of bitterness. Some have regarded the end of the British presence in Malaya as inescapable because of alleged earlier British promises and long-planned intentions. For others, the perceived lack of gratefulness on the part of (former) colonial subjects has left a sour taste in their mouths.

Not simply adhering to the east versus west concept does not necessarily insinuate that alternative explanations have centred on decolonisation. Some veterans have simply added

<sup>302</sup> The author has implied three imperial implosions of which only the last one, between 1959 and 1964, triggered a response in Britain. See J. M. MacKenzie, 'The Persistence of Empire' in Ward, *British Culture and the End of Empire*, 28 and 32-3.

<sup>303</sup> LSE 42 (2631).

<sup>304</sup> '31<sup>st</sup> August 1957 – Merdeka for Malaya', documentary by the Malayan Film Unit, 1957, IWM (film section), accession number MGH 2245.



further facets when musing on the Malayan Emergency or hinted at its complexity. Some have also adopted the theory that the British did not withdraw from Malaya or from any other territory at the time. They had simply developed these areas to an extent that the locals could start governing themselves. Richard Clutterbuck for instance noted:

When the Tunku took over UMNO, the British Government had begun preparing the country for independence on the model successfully developed in India between the wars: gradually bringing elected members into the federal executive and legislative councils and at the same time introducing fully elected municipal and village councils. [...] It takes at least thirty years to prepare a colony for independence from the time that there is a serious intention to do so. This is the time that it takes to put a generation through school, select enough of the best for university training, and give the graduates practice in their professions before they take up the leadership. The British had been working for this in Malaya since the 1920's and 1930's. [...] Though the Japanese forced a break from 1942 to 1945, this had little effect, since most of the future leaders had already been through a university. [...] Early in 1956 [...] Tunku Abdul Rahman went to London to negotiate final independence. The British Government agreed to fix August 31, 1957, as Independence Day. In the happiest of celebrations [...] power was handed over...<sup>305</sup>

Clutterbuck, perhaps unknowingly, ignored less altruistic deliberations. Among them figures the fact that Malaya eventually ceased to be the crucial dollar earner it had represented after WWII. As Stockwell has argued: "When Attlee formed his second administration after the general election of February 1950 it was clear that, if Malaya was too wealthy to lose, it was fast becoming too expensive to maintain."<sup>306</sup>

To contemplate on the end of British rule in Malaya required perhaps that servicemen actively witnessed it. Peter Maule-Finch, an infantry officer who later joined the Malayan Police before turning plantation manager, decided to stay in Malaya after independence. His decision was made easier by the fact that the newly independent government actively encouraged men like him to remain in their jobs. Once self-government arrived, Maule-Finch barely noticed it. The only visible signs of a new area consisted in a different category of citizenship and altered colours on his identity card. When he finally departed for personal reasons he felt a profound sadness. "That's home to me", he remarked during an interview.<sup>307</sup> Indeed, home it was in more than one way. His grandparents had moved to Malaya in the 1920s and his father had been educated in Singapore.

Noel Baptiste, a former dragoon guard, had similarly strong links with Malaya. Growing up there he had reason to reflect on the roots of the emergency and on decolonisation in general. Regarding the latter Baptiste judged: "Well, of course, it [independence] was inevitable. Malaya had been promised independence before the war."<sup>308</sup> He then added somewhat critically:

<sup>305</sup> Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 139-43.

<sup>306</sup> Stockwell, 'British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya', *JICH*, 79.

<sup>307</sup> 16.2.1988, IWM, 10120.

<sup>308</sup> Stockwell would not entirely agree writing: "In 1948 the government were thinking rather vaguely in terms of a 25-year transition period..." See Stockwell, 'British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya', *JICH*, 72. Bayly and Harper have referred to concrete discussions from 1953 on. See Bayly & Harper, *Forgotten Wars*, 528-30 and 535.

But even during the emergency there hadn't been any formal request to the British government by the local rulers for independence. It seemed they were quite content to continue under British protection but naturally the British authorities considered that it would be a major propaganda victory to announce that the country was going to get independence because it would destroy the main plank of the Communist platform...

Baptiste's side blow against Whitehall suggests that he, and probably many other expatriates, did not entirely approve of London's political strategy. Whether self-government really hastened the end of the emergency and whether its proposition was entirely due to propaganda is a different question. What is not is that the 'Tunku' himself later admitted that he and his colleagues had not strongly pressed for self-government.<sup>309</sup>

Baptiste's interviewer asked him at one point what he thought the emergency was all about.<sup>310</sup> To this the veteran replied: "... it was very clear to me that it was a question of whether once more we were going to be defeated in Malaya and forced out of the country as refugees – which already happened to my family once – or whether our military resistance was going to be properly organised and would prevent that [from] happening." The emotional answer implies that the fall of Singapore, and the symbolic humiliation that came with it, marked him more than the wave of decolonisation after WWII.<sup>311</sup> But contrary to many of his colleagues he could understand the reluctance of the Chinese to back the colonial power when the latter had been unable to defend them in WWII.

Baptiste also echoed Mackay by accusing the British administration of "effectively turning back the clock to 1942" upon re-entering Malaya. His interviewer did not ask him to elaborate on this statement so that we are left to guess what the veteran purported in detail and what an alternative approach would have looked like. Regardless of such a substitute, the former dragoon guard represents an exception in many ways. Not only had he grown up in Malaya as son of a scientist in the rubber industry. He had also obtained a solid public school education before doing his National Service.<sup>312</sup>

Other exceptions to the rule have proven as critical as Baptiste. John Cross,<sup>313</sup> a former Gurkha officer, is another example. He had already witnessed the British departure from India and Burma. Shortly before being posted to Malaya he fought the Viet Minh – a "ruthless bunch" – during the British occupation of Indochina after WWII. After Malaya's independence he continued to operate against the remaining communist guerrillas on the Thai border before assisting in the struggle against Indonesia. Cross could not hide his resentment vis-à-vis former colonial subjects when he remarked:

<sup>309</sup> B. Nasson, *Britannia's Empire: A Short History of the British Empire* (2006), p. 284.

<sup>310</sup> Within the thirty to forty hours of tapes listened to for this research this is the only occasion staff put forward such a query.

<sup>311</sup> Baptiste himself was not in Singapore or Malaya at the time British troops surrendered but his father spent the war in a Japanese prisoner's camp.

<sup>312</sup> Interview, 1.2.1986, IWM, 10107.

<sup>313</sup> The former officer has published several books, among them: *A Face Like a Chicken's Backside: An Unconventional Soldier in Southeast Asia, 1948-1971* (1996) and *Jungle Warfare: Experiences and Encounters* (1998).

We'd seen nothing but our flag pulled down and we were spat at et cetera. And it was all very nasty. And we were delighted to get to somewhere where it was peaceful. Haha. [...] We started off in 1948 and I remember with great joy on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1957 actually seeing a Malay sweat. It's the last few yards that [are] most difficult. For them and in the propaganda they put out since we left, the British troops didn't do anything but hinder. This is the sadness.<sup>314</sup>

Cross did not elaborate on the reasons the Union Jack was pulled down in all those territories or why people spat at them.<sup>315</sup> At least though, he put the emergency in a wider regional context.

A handful of (ex)-servicemen have pondered on and questioned their involvement in the emergency as a result of injuries, diseases or the death of close friends. Once a soldier spent weeks lying in bed unable to sleep because of endless pain, fever or diarrhoea he had indeed ample time to do so.<sup>316</sup> The same went for family members who learned of their son's and brother's death in a far away jungle. In this context it is worth quoting three incidents which echoed back home. In October 1951 twelve British soldiers of the Royal West Kents were ambushed and killed. In a similar attack the Gordon Highlanders suffered seven deaths in 1952. The Green Howards lost six of their men in as many days during the same year. Among those casualties were National Servicemen, which caused considerable alarm in Britain. Trevor Royle has maintained that while the death of regular soldiers might be viewed as a risk attached to their profession, things were different with conscripts.

Even if servicemen themselves survived enemy attacks, scars could remain. The above-mentioned author has cited the example of William Skinner whose unit, the Seaforth Highlanders, fought the first battles in Malaya. Shortly before the end of his tour a bullet hit Skinner in the back. He subsequently went through eight operations just to end up still 50% disabled. Not surprisingly, the former National Serviceman has regretted his tour of duty, lamented the lack of state care, and probably wondered what exactly he had fought for.<sup>317</sup> Those who have suffered from what later became known as post-traumatic stress disorder have had similar reactions. Unfortunately for them such a diagnosis did not exist then nor was any particular cure at hand upon their return. Former Private White remarked: "The medical profession now label it as 'Post Traumatic Stress Disorder' – back then, it was, 'get a grip, pull yourself together!'"<sup>318</sup> Many have done so but it has not always proven easy – neither for them nor for their relatives. Former conscript Tony Hamilton recalled in an interview that he could barely sit still upon his return and spent the first nights in a shed.<sup>319</sup>

More than the physical and psychological scars it seems to have been the general lack of interest in their military contribution and later fate, which has angered some veterans. Cliff Holland for instance lamented:

<sup>314</sup> Interview by Charles Allen, BBC Radio 4, 1983, IWM, 8487.

<sup>315</sup> In his defence it should be added that his interviewer did not press him on the issue.

<sup>316</sup> Afore-mentioned Oliver Crawford did so during convalescence while listening to the news. See Crawford, *The Door Marked Malaya*, 226-37.

<sup>317</sup> Royle, *The Best Years of their Lives*, 177.

<sup>318</sup> See [www.britains-smallwars.com/malaya/windo.htm](http://www.britains-smallwars.com/malaya/windo.htm).

<sup>319</sup> Interview conducted by myself, 19.9.2006.

I was a soldier. Very proud to be a soldier. And I did what I was told. [...] But in retrospect... I'm nearly seventy now. I have this little flat. I have a little money in the bank. I've got a [...] car. But I don't have a lot. Now, what was going on in Malaya wouldn't have made a great deal of difference for a seventeen year old in this country at the time. I didn't have any share in a rubber company. It was rubber what we were there to protect. I didn't have any shares in the tin mines. I only know that when I came back nobody was particularly interested in me. Oh no. Nobody has ever been.<sup>320</sup>

For others the economic background posed less of a problem. Neither Tony Rodgers nor his colleagues, whom I encountered during a regimental celebration,<sup>321</sup> appear to have held any grudges. This is so despite learning from their superior that their task essentially consisted in keeping Malaya's rubber flowing.

Some servicemen simply grabbed the opportunities presenting themselves at the time. George Saunders, a German Jew and WWII veteran, joined the SAS in Malaya and switched to the police before becoming the right hand of the sultan of Johore. When Governor McGillivray criticised Saunderson's less than traditional approach to colonial administration – demands for full control over the sultan's finances, the right to hire and fire or interest-free loans – the latter replied: "Look, Sir, [after independence] you're gone, I'm gone. *Après nous le déluge*. What do we care?"<sup>322</sup>

Another category of men with untypical reactions consisted of those who gained access to intelligence information on the emergency. They read reports about the composition of the communist movement, Malaya's economic and social problems or Whitehall's long-term plans. Based on this information they could draw more complex conclusions or ignore official propaganda. One obvious example is General Templer. The latter always insisted that the solution to the conflict lay in the hands of the civilian administration and that independence would be the inevitable (and perhaps desirable) outcome. When later recalling issues and goals at the time Templer stated: "As I saw it, the problems would be: Organisation for and timing of elections at the various levels; land settlement and ownership; citizenship; education. All of these leading up to a united nation whose only loyalty would be to an independent Malaya – as it was then – within the British Commonwealth."<sup>323</sup> Given his broad responsibilities it is logical that Templer reflected on the civilian aspects of the emergency. Yet the general had spent most of his life in the forces. It would have come as little surprise if he had seen the emergency from a mostly military perspective.

Still, the general and his men never forgot the precondition for the necessary calm and stability which could facilitate political developments: They had to defeat the insurgents. Accordingly, military aims were often very straightforward and the joy over success unrestrained. Adrian Evill,

<sup>320</sup> *The Peacetime Conscripts*, by Charles Wheeler for BBC Radio 4 (2001).

<sup>321</sup> 1.8.2007.

<sup>322</sup> Interview, 4.1.1994, IWM, 13660.

<sup>323</sup> 'Templer on Malaya', script by J. P. Jenkins, Services Kinema Corporation, 1976-1977, in papers of Major-General David L. Lloyd-Owen relating to his service as Templer's military assistant in Malaya, National Army Museum, 8011-132-2.

a former KAR<sup>324</sup> officer, gleefully remembered decades later: “To me it was tremendously satisfying that by the time we left we [had] completely broken the communist effort in the whole of the state. There were no senior communists out in the jungle of any note left. All people were getting back to normal life. It was a very happy thought to leave that particular part of Malaya.”<sup>325</sup>

Perhaps due to the ultimate success none of the ‘special cases’ listed above seriously questioned Britain’s capacities to impose its will. It appears as if it was in a separate theatre that servicemen and civilians alike woke up to the unpleasant reality of Britain’s fading influence.<sup>326</sup> Captain R. T. Booth did tours of duty both in Malaya and in the Middle East as a professional soldier and later remembered: “At Suez Britain passed through a gate [...] to a new and harsher world of economic and political reality. We would never again be able to shrug off international reaction as in imperial days and send a gunboat to depose a wog we disliked.” The former captain added an intriguing passage in his recollections, in which he reflected on military-civilian relations, as well as on the silence and compliance surrounding the military establishment when it came to decolonisation:

One or two civilians, contemporaries of mine, cavilled at my military professionalism [in connection with Suez]. They did not know that the web of loyalty and sinew that characterises any regiment and which in tradition subjugates it to civilian power. I challenged them to declare if they wanted their military to be politically articulate. The officer corps of the British army was then and I suspect is still overwhelmingly Conservative in its allegiance but has been impeccable in carrying out instructions from governments of any party. It’s taken for granted that it should be so. I was to remind these critics later of French army factional allegiance to their settlers in Algeria. Rumours persisted then that General Massu might drop his parachute brigade near Paris to influence his government’s policy. How would my English critics feel to learn perhaps that the parachute commander at Aldershot planned to drop his brigade on Parliament Fields to influence the House of Commons? Did they want military commanders for example to openly side with political parties or show allegiance to one faction or another in Northern Ireland? I think burnt into our psyche is a distrust of the military since our government by major generals under Cromwell. At the M.O.D. today in central London staff wear civilian clothes, following a long tradition. At the Pentagon and similar establishments in other capitals senior officers always wear uniform. There is a democratic significance in this small detail.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> King’s African Rifles.

<sup>325</sup> Interview, IWM, 9854, 1.7.1987.

<sup>326</sup> Given the considerable literature on the topic obviously not every author would fully agree with the decisive nature of the Suez debacle. One who has done so is Darwin in *The End of the British Empire*, 121-2.

<sup>327</sup> Private papers, IWM (documents), accession number 7628 (box 98/3/1).

## Views on insurgents

The categorisation of the insurgents has followed that of the insurgency itself. With a few exceptions, (former) servicemen have stuck to the official label, i.e. communist terrorists,<sup>328</sup> with emphasis on the second term. Leonard Spicer went even further categorising the opposition as “ruthless and cold-blooded killers”. P. S. Leigh noted that he “did not think they had popular support, even amongst the Chinese, and certainly not with the Malays.”<sup>329</sup>

From this it followed that guerrillas were either extremists to be eliminated, or in some cases, naïve, young men who had to be wrestled away from the grip of their fanatic leaders. Only a minority within the former security forces have acknowledged that social, racial, political and economic issues could have driven young Chinese (or Malays and Indians) into the hands of the communist movement. Respect for former foes has remained limited. Despite that, senior military figures did not take the enemy lightly and had some grasp of their motivation. As Richard Clutterbuck explained:

It is a common and dangerous error to underestimate the quality of Communist guerrillas. In Malaya, the[ir] education [...] was generally above the average. Although they grew up amid the administrative chaos of the Japanese occupation, many of them had spent six years in school. This was often one of the causes of the frustration that had driven them into becoming Communists. Most of them had lived in villages where the only work was tapping rubber. They wanted something better. Many of the younger generation in the towns were no less frustrated. Some had left their villages in the hope of a better life, but they could get only menial jobs. The Communists seemed to offer them the opportunity to get somewhere, to be someone. They took to the jungle with high hopes, which often remained high for two or three years. Lack of promotion usually set off the process of disillusion. [...] They received little encouragement from the villagers, who greeted them not as liberators but as burdens on the backs of the people.<sup>330</sup>

The author and veteran did not analyse why it was that those young men could get only tedious employment. There is no statement in his book implying that the colonial (and military) administrations might have been partly to blame. If chaos and stagnation reigned the Japanese were the culprits. The author further ruled out any sympathy among the non-combatant Chinese towards the guerrillas, even though many continued to supply the latter from the wired and guarded new villages.<sup>331</sup> Clutterbuck also omitted any notion of family ties even though he must

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<sup>328</sup> The term itself was subject to long and heated discussions. In an effort to discredit the rebels officials labelled them first as ‘gangsters’ and ‘bandits’. Unfortunately, the Japanese had done the same. To prevent associations and to highlight the thorny task of the security forces officials shifted to the term ‘communist terrorists’ in 1952. See Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds*, 84-5.

<sup>329</sup> Questionnaires, 14.5 and 26.9.2007.

<sup>330</sup> Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War*, 102-3.

<sup>331</sup> This all the more surprising as the author read, among other publications, Han Suyin’s novel *And the Rain My Drink* (1956). The author depicted the life of rubber tappers caught between guerrillas and security forces. Its undertone is rather critical of both sides but most so of loyalist Chinese (informers) – the so called ‘running dogs’.

have known that the guerrillas left behind large kin. Leaving these aspects out reinforced the theory that the communists represented something alien, disconnected and corrupted.<sup>332</sup>

Victor Purcell, principal advisor on Chinese affairs to the BMA, hit a similar tone. In a letter to the editor of *The Times*<sup>333</sup> he commented:

There is no 'Malayan people' and no Malayan national sentiment, let alone a national movement. This is probably a misfortune for Malaya but it is a fact. [...] The impression I received of the AJA [Anti-Japanese Army] on the re-entry of the British Army in 1945 was that the rank and file were all of the labouring type. [...] To the observer at a distance the scale and intensity of the present operations suggest that the Communist direction were not wasting their forces against the Japanese but reserving them for use against their then allies; it also suggest the intervention of a more efficient, more determined element from outside. The terrorists certainly do not represent the 2,500,000 Malays and other Malaysians; they do not represent the 600,000 Indians; and they represent but a tiny minority of the Chinese.

Even someone like Richard Broome suspected that international communist efforts spurred anti-British agitation in Malaya rather than nationalism or British blunders. Broome knew the opposition well. He had recruited and trained the MPAJA during WWII before joining first the BMA and then the Foreign Office. He claimed that only a minority of those, who took up arms against Britain, had been in the jungle with him and his colleague John Davies. According to him, the majority happily returned to mines and plantations while a hardcore hid until the resumption of hostilities.<sup>334</sup>

Purcell and Broome were right in that not all who had taken to the jungle after the Japanese invasion did so again in 1948. It is equally correct that the MPAJA rarely if ever fought the Imperial Army. And the rebels barely gained the support of Malays and Indians. This was the case despite the three stars, reflecting Malaya's three main population groups, which prominently featured on the insurgents' caps. But whether only a minority of the Chinese themselves backed the rebels is debatable. What is less arguable is Broome's sense of bitterness in the face of an alleged betrayal by former allies. This is somewhat astonishing given that the MPAJA's leaders made no particular secret of their after-war plans, i.e. ultimately ending the British presence in Malaya.<sup>335</sup> Nevertheless, the views (or motivations) of witnesses like Broome, Purcell or Clutterbuck have rarely come under fire. Few of their colleagues have pondered in depth on the reasons why anyone would endure great hardship in the jungle and rise up against the colonial power.

Yet some have voiced slightly differing views. One of them was Lemon Hart, a staff officer with the SAS and later employed by the military intelligence branch. In regard to his enemies he commented: "I think very personally they were all Chinese before they were communists. [...] I think some of them probably were communists because that was a way to further the Chinese

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<sup>332</sup> This specific criticism should not deflect from Clutterbuck's unrivalled understanding of military aspects of (counter-) insurgency and terrorism. Some of his twenty books are as relevant today as they were in the 1960s.  
<sup>333</sup> 24.8.1948.

<sup>334</sup> Interview, 24.7.1984, IWM, 8255.

<sup>335</sup> Short, *In Pursuit of Mountain Rats*, 23.

future in Malaya rather than because they believed in communism...” Hart gained his insight not least from being present during an interrogation of a surrendered communist guerrilla. Such insights aside he, too, abstained from expressing any respect for the opposition.<sup>336</sup>

One who did was Derek Blake. He initially served in the military police before joining the Royal West Kent Regiment in Malaya as a private. Quizzed on the opposition he remarked:

I have nothing but the highest admiration for them. They were very, very good soldiers in [...] jungle warfare – they were very, very efficient. I can't fault them at all. They were [...] very, very brave people [...] I suppose their ideology kept them going. They obviously believed very, very deeply in what they were doing. They were totally committed to the movement, the Communist Party, or whatever – almost to the point of being fanatical...

The explanation for such an unusual statement probably lies less in Blake's fairly ordinary background than in his curious, open-minded but also analytical character. Unlike the average testimony, his features various comments on military infighting, alcoholism, prostitution and race relations in Malaya.<sup>337</sup>

Neal Ascherson, a National Service officer with the Royal Marines, expressed similar thoughts. He was greatly impressed seeing an insurgent return from the jungle's safety to rescue a wounded colleague thereby getting killed. After discovering and reading enemy correspondence Ascherson came to deem his opposition deeply “romantic” but also slightly naive. He, too, is not representative. He had joined a relatively egalitarian branch of the forces and was highly critical of the situation in Malaya. More importantly, Ascherson is an Eton and Cambridge graduate, who went on to become a prolific and highly respected journalist and writer.<sup>338</sup>

Thanks to American scholar Lucian Pye, the British authorities had quite a clear picture of their opponents' experiences and motivations. But they do not appear to have made that information available to ordinary soldiers. Pye's insights would have offered food for thought but did so only to a limited extent. He found that his Chinese study subjects had not necessarily been hostile to the colonial administration before joining the communists. Often their leaders instilled in them resentment during training. Few had actually had much previous contact with Europeans. But they had been advised to be prudent when having to deal with a seemingly unpredictable but essentially distant government. Many had come to regard the colonial establishment as weak, which led them to underestimate the governmental response to the insurgency.<sup>339</sup>

The security forces and administration also managed to intercept the MCP's correspondence, pamphlets and journals. What the translations demonstrate, apart from communist rhetoric, is an acute awareness of international events. Among issues analysed in the various writings featured the Korean and Indochinese wars, Japanese re-arming, the Indian Congress Party, tax increases in Malaya, Templer's arrival, Lyttelton's plans for Malaya, the composition of the security forces,

<sup>336</sup> Interview, 3.11.1986, IWM, 9480.

<sup>337</sup> Interview, 11.8.1985, IWM, 8943.

<sup>338</sup> Walker, *Six Campaigns*, 1-7 and [www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Jascherson.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/Jascherson.htm).

<sup>339</sup> Pye, *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya*, 201-5.



the Queen's coronation and power struggles between Bevan and Attlee. The content of the texts betray not only an avid study of papers but also a considerable local network of informants.<sup>340</sup>

Personal recollections of insurgents themselves have remained unheard until recently. Agnes Khoo has suggested that this owed in part to the efforts of the Malaysian and Singaporean governments. She interviewed several of the retired female guerrillas living in the 'peace' and 'friendship villages' of southern Thailand.<sup>341</sup> Apart from offering fascinating insights some of the testimonies contradict British government propaganda and veterans' impressions. To begin with, the remaining communists are not exclusively Chinese but also Malayan and even Thai. Social backgrounds can widely diverge, keeping in mind that some of the interviewees joined the resistance after 1960. Some, like Lin Guan Ying, came from destitute families, others, like Xiao Hua, grew up in affluent settings. All however became radicalised through a combination of stifling conservative values in the community, economic hardship, governmental repression and the Japanese occupation. They saw little difference between British and Japanese rule although the latter stood out through particular brutality. None of the interviewees was coerced into the MCP, which appeared to them as the only alternative to imperial rule. One gains the impression that joining the former seemed a logical and natural step. As Khoo has summarised:

Most of these women joined the movement primarily as a form of rebellion against the feudalistic, patriarchal oppression they experienced as young women. They were born into and were living in a period of turmoil and transition, of major socio-economic and political change. They were exposed to new possibilities, which their own mothers could not have dreamt of, such as going to school and choosing their own partners for marriage. [...] On the other hand, their emerging freedoms were also being curtailed, disrupted or even robbed, sometimes violently, by the wars in the Malayan peninsula and the adjacent island of Singapore. [...] It seems that, for most, ideology was not the primary motivation for joining the movement. Commitment to the cause or the belief in Marxism or socialism only came later as they became gradually aware of how these ideologies offered the possibility of a different society from the one which they knew.<sup>342</sup>

This echoes similar statements made by their former leader, Chin Peng. The latter argued in his memoirs:

I had to be a liberation fighter. If you had lived in a Malayan rural population centre like Sitiawan and observed how dismissive the British colonials were of our lot in the 1930s, you would find it easier to understand how the attraction of a Communist Party of Malaya could take hold. My involvement was not born of a series of personal slights, rather it was the result

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<sup>340</sup> 'Recovered Communist Propaganda Documents', Director of Special Branch to the Commissioner of Police, 1 and 23.4, 13.5, 4.6, 11.9, 21.10 and 3.12.1953, NA, CO 1022/46.

<sup>341</sup> Four of these villages exist in southern Thailand. They were set up after a Thai-brokered peace deal between the guerrillas and the Malaysian government. (Singapore abstained from the talks.) Three are inhabited predominantly by Chinese but one is largely Malay. Two other communities sprang up not too far away by a rival faction who named them 'friendship villages' after a separate deal. The Thai government set aside land plots for all of them. The villages are under the patronage of Princess Chulaporn of Thailand. See A. Khoo, *Life as the River Flows: Women in the Malayan Anti-Colonial Struggle* (2004), pp. 1-16.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 51, 208 and 214 (quote 11-2).

of objective scrutiny and years of intellectual introspection. And if you had gone through the ghastly period of the corrupt British Military Administration immediately after the Japanese capitulation and seen the wholesale poverty that pervaded after years of Japanese atrocities, if you had watched how this administration worked in Malayan towns and villages, you would not be quick to say that I should have been cool-headed and taken an easier road. I could not compromise with the Japanese; neither could I have worked within a system that perpetrated the continuance of British colonialism. [...] To those who displayed anti-colonial sentiments, they dangled the horror of banishment to China which, pre-1949, meant death for the majority and prison for the rest. More thugs were brought in to silence the grievances of workers. ... To contain the Emergency the British burned villages, cut rations and shot civilians. [...] I make no apologies for seeking to replace such an odious system with a form of Marxist socialism. Colonial exploitation, irrespective of who were the masters, Japanese or British, was morally wrong.

Chin Peng's condemnation would undoubtedly sound more credible if he had not downplayed the extent and frequency of his troops' atrocities against civilians as troubling but isolated incidents or justified punishments.<sup>343</sup> The reality was that attacks on installations and individuals became so widespread that it prompted the famous October resolutions. On the other hand, one has to wonder whether the official British response stood on higher moral ground. Huw Bennett has argued that the army initially and calculatingly used mass detention, deportation, forced relocations and the destruction of property to coerce the Chinese population into cooperation while turning a blind eye to indiscriminate shootings.<sup>344</sup> However, such explicitly aggressive methods are not echoed in soldierly testimonies of the time, partly, perhaps, because such patterns would not necessarily have been evident for those on the spot. Few servicemen would have participated in all of above measures whose ultimate goal – 'screwing down the people', as Hack has termed it<sup>345</sup> – would certainly not have been spelled out in orders.

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<sup>343</sup> Ward, Miraflor and Chin Peng, *My Side of History*, 273, 280, 309 and 511 (Quote from p. 510-11).

<sup>344</sup> Bennett in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32:3, 415-44.

<sup>345</sup> Hack, *Defence and Decolonisation in Southeast Asia*, 113 and 118.

## Chapter 4: “I did not join the resistance in order to give my life for colonialism” – French opinions on rebellion and rebels in Indochina

Upon his arrival in Indochina, General Navarre summarised the war, the enemy and French goals as follows:

Until the arrival of communism on the borders of Indochina, we envisioned the end of the war merely through the submission of the rebels. Little by little we had to revise that conception. The Viet Minh, now helped by China, became a more formidable adversary every day with whom we felt more and more we had to seek a compromise. On the other hand, the independence we progressively accorded to the associated states gave them a say in the matter: but their ideas of a peace would undoubtedly be different from ours. Finally, since America had given us her support, she had acquired the right to be consulted. The re-establishment of peace had therefore become a complex problem with multiple factors. It had never been thoroughly studied [...] France neither knew why she was waging war nor did she have an idea in what manner she wanted to terminate it.<sup>346</sup>

Anthony Clayton has corroborated French views on the changing circumstances during the Indochina War. According to him, the conflict could be divided into two distinct phases from a French point of view: a colonial one from 1945 to 1949 and an international one between 1950 and 1954. In this scheme French troops initially sought to re-establish French suzerainty. Acknowledging growing nationalism, politicians accorded the status of associated states within the French Union<sup>347</sup> to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Once China and the US got involved in the war between 1949 and 1950, the CEFEQ's role altered in that it now had to stem the advance of communist forces in Southeast Asia.<sup>348</sup>

It is at least conceivable that French (ex-)servicemen (have) based their recollections on this time structure. Yet testimonies reveal that the human reality looked at times more subtle and complex. In this chapter it is thus argued that (ex-)soldiers' perceptions of the conflict, French objectives, their own motivations and views of the enemy have considerably varied and changed depending on personal circumstances. While the pondering has tended to centre on military prospects and outcomes, political, economic, social and even cultural aspects have frequently played into it. At the same time, the French Empire (or Union) and its demise have often played lesser roles than the Cold War, individual experiences or professional attitudes. Imperial soldiers in the mould of General Salan had become rarer. The latter mused in his memoirs: “It is with the

<sup>346</sup> Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, 285.

<sup>347</sup> The French Union was a bi-product of the 1946 constitution and was supposed to replace the old empire. In the new framework governor (-generals) turned into high-commissioners. Composed of the French Republic, as well as of overseas and associated territories, states and departments the union theoretically implied equal rights regardless of race and religion. In reality the French president also served as the head of the French Union while the latter's assembly enjoyed only consultative rights. On the other hand, new assemblies were set up in most former overseas territories and voters could elect deputies to the French parliament. The Union only lasted in name until 1958 when de Gaulle replaced it with the 'community'. See Aldrich, *Greater France*, 281-2 and 302.

<sup>348</sup> Clayton, *The Wars of French Decolonization*, 39.

loss of Indochina that the fundamentals of the French Empire were undermined. To lose an empire means losing oneself. It means to take away all sense from a man's life..."<sup>349</sup>

Some cadres, blinded by notions of French grandeur, felt to the bitter end that France should have attempted to hold on to Indochina. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these tended to be senior commanders, at the time safely tucked away in headquarters. More realistic officers put their faith into US hands, doubting France's ability and willingness to fight the war. Others greatly resented the fact that a former global power should enter into a coalition of American vassal states. Some advocated negotiations and gradual withdrawal as early as 1946, regarding as unfeasible the maintenance of old imperial structures in the face of growing nationalism. They fought with the goal in mind to acquire strong cards for future negotiations, whose ultimate goal it was to maintain Indochina within the French Union. Interestingly, the most able and successful commanders, the Generals Leclerc and de Lattre, fell into this category.<sup>350</sup>

Certain junior officers, frequently commanding elite airborne and legionnaire units, understood the conflict in purely professional terms. Such men, embodied by the likes of Marcel Bigeard, fought not least for their own reputation and for that of their units. To them warfare represented the most honourable and exciting way of life, regardless of the possible outcome.<sup>351</sup> Like many British soldiers, they accepted their orders without much questioning. As the veterans' current spokesperson, General Simon, wrote in a letter: "... the French soldier goes where his superior sends him in the name of France."<sup>352</sup>

Further, there were servicemen who created strong bonds with local people, particularly ethnic and religious minorities. By commanding, for example, a Thai company, an officer often sought to protect the traditional regional base of this ethnicity more than anything else. Often they did not specifically oppose communism as such but any form of totalitarianism. Among them figured the young officer Hélié de Saint-Marc, who exclaimed in his memoirs:

Spare me the ritual litanies regarding the traffic of the piastres [...] and the domination of the little whites. I had not joined the resistance in order to give my life for colonialism four years later. I had not gone through the rolling mill of deportation to protect the interest of the Bank of Indochina. Many very precious things existed in Vietnam [...] – the liberty to think, believe and live, the exchange (with) and the heritage of the West – that justified going through the horror to preserve them. In Vietnam we fought against totalitarianism. The war alongside Vietnamese nationalists seemed to us preferable to a peace with communists.<sup>353</sup>

Such loyalty could extend to the associated states in general. During an official dinner given by the Vietnamese government on March 1, 1951, General de Lattre emphasised that the French were fighting to preserve the newly gained independence of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.<sup>354</sup>

<sup>349</sup> Salan, *Mémoires*, 442.

<sup>350</sup> That said, Leclerc's seemingly progressive stance has sometimes been overestimated as has his disaccord with d'Argenlieu. Their differences were less political and more personal. The point of contention lay in the general's official subordination to the admiral. See Masson, *Histoire de l'armée française de 1918 à nos jours*, 394-5. At least this is what the survivors have claimed. It appears though as if someone like Bigeard rather enjoyed the time away from battles, during which he published five books (with professional help).  
<sup>351</sup>  
<sup>352</sup> 14.10.2008.

<sup>353</sup> De Saint-Marc, *Mémoires*, 136-7.

<sup>354</sup> *Chroniques d'outre-mer, études et informations*, no. 4, April 1951, LSE 44 (R92).

Then there were protagonists like Ginette Dupont-Subirada, who worked as secretary at the *Direction générale des études et recherches* (DGER) and later at the headquarters in Laos. She had not got involved with the resistance during WWII for fear of reprisals against her family. Feeling guilty, she made up for it with enlisting in 1945 and ended up in Indochina.<sup>355</sup>

A few servicemen joined the CEFEO to revive their military careers after 'failing' to re-join the Allies or ending up in the wrong camp during WWII. Finally, a number of French soldiers served in Indochina with no particular aim in mind and without endorsing any political opinion but intending to get away from their surroundings. Veteran Jean Robert, for instance, admitted that he had been trying to escape difficult circumstances in France when he had signed up with the army.<sup>356</sup>

In some cases all of the above or a mixture of opinions held true and still does for the survivors. Realities on the ground, political developments but also unfamiliarity with Indochina changed initial motivations and perceptions. Location also played its part. The nature of the war in the southern swamps differed considerably from that along the Annamese coast or in the northern highlands.

Soldiers' diverging assessments of the Indochinese situation has been echoed in one of Michel Bodin's book. In it the author asked: "... Indochina saw a multitude of combatants with widely diverse occupations and origins. [...] Is it possible to speak of a soldier of Indochina to the extent that one reveals a similarity in reactions and ways of thinking?"<sup>357</sup>

Still, certain patterns are discernible. Feelings of impotence and disillusion regularly grew the more soldiers realised the true extent of the rebellion in Indochina, and France's lack of preparation for the challenges. What soldiers initially perceived as routine tasks, i.e. the re-establishment of colonial control in the face of sporadic local unrest and the Japanese presence, turned into a full-scale war in front of their eyes. The realisation set in over months and years that they no longer faced a few unruly colonial subjects but a regular army relying on popular support and aided by the communist block. At the same time their status and that of their allies changed. As Girard has implied:

...the war waged by France continued until 1954, when for four years the principle of independence of its old possessions of Southeast Asia had been plainly acknowledged by her. [...] For the French troops it was no longer a matter of fighting to save the heritage of Francis Garnier or Jules Ferry. It was a matter of fighting to halt the communist penetration to preserve the values of the 'Free World'.<sup>358</sup>

The aim of this chapter is not only to illustrate the variety and transformation of thinking but also to explain the reasons behind them. It broadly consists of two parts. In the first I will outline the aspects that shaped soldierly outlooks. In the second I will analyse these often changing perceptions based on the war's stages.

<sup>355</sup> [www.anac-fr.com/f\\_2gm.htm](http://www.anac-fr.com/f_2gm.htm).

<sup>356</sup> Albert, *Le silence des rizières* (documentary).

<sup>357</sup> Bodin, *Les combattants français face à la guerre d'Indochine*, 259.

<sup>358</sup> Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962*, 200-4 (quote on p. 204).

### The slow coming to terms with the end of empire

There are good reasons why decolonisation did not necessarily play a major role in soldierly takes on the Indochina War. It would have required a general interest in empire and an awareness of its gradual disintegration after the 1940s. Neither abounded among the population and even servicemen despite the effects of WWII. Few would have predicted what Martin Thomas has summed up: "The divided French empire of the Second World War never entirely recovered from the rifts that had opened up between rulers and ruled."<sup>359</sup>

The relative ignorance is somewhat startling. After all, colonial troops contributed considerably to the French war effort between 1914 and 1918 – a contribution that did not go unnoticed in France. On the other hand, 44% of the French thought it better on the eve of WWII to rid themselves of overseas territories than having to defend them in case of a renewed global conflict.<sup>360</sup> In view of such nonchalance it is ironic that colonial troops once more came to France's rescue after the collapse of the metropolitan army in 1940. But the largely African composition of Generals Juin's and de Lattre's armies does not seem to have dramatically strengthened the imperial bonds from the point of view of ordinary French. Nor did it trigger great gratitude. Most French reserved such feelings for the allied forces (including Leclerc's *Demi-brigade*) landing in Normandy and storming through Europe.<sup>361</sup>

Such attitudes might well have stemmed from official notions that control over other peoples had always meant to be temporary. Unfortunately, the criteria and timeframe for the phasing out had never been defined. That was unlikely to happen during WWII when both Pétain and de Gaulle stressed the importance and loyalty of the empire. Both knew that without it France would only represent a middle power.

Moreover, the patterns of decolonisation would have been difficult to discern. France withdrew from the Levant during the war under British pressure. The Sétif uprising in Algeria on D-Day was regarded even by French communists as a fascist-inspired plot.<sup>362</sup> The insurgency in Madagascar appeared like a throwback into the dark ages or at least as an inter-ethnic issue. From a French point of view the Suez campaign was intrinsically linked with the Algerian War and fought in conjunction with Britain and Israel. As for Southeast Asia, General Simon, explained in another letter that: "The concept of decolonisation came after the Indochina War, which occurred in the context of the Cold War."<sup>363</sup> Others would have contested this notion given that Algeria was officially part of France. When that conflict was all over (or most of it) the trauma initially seems to have evaporated relatively quickly in France. In 1987 only 7% of the population saw the conflict as a major occurrence in French 20<sup>th</sup> century history.<sup>364</sup>

The Indochina War stirred public sentiments to an even lesser degree despite active lobbying pro and contra on the (far) left and right. This has been the conclusion of Alain Ruscio after

<sup>359</sup> Thomas, *The French Empire at War*, 263.

<sup>360</sup> Thobie, Meynier, Laquery-Vidrovitch & Ageron, *Histoire de la France coloniale*, 569.

<sup>361</sup> Planchais, *Une histoire politique de l'armée*, 85-7.

<sup>362</sup> Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France*, 193-201, 208-10 and 275.

<sup>363</sup> 28.11.2008.

<sup>364</sup> Thobie, Meynier, Coquery-Vidrovitch & Ageron, *Histoire de la France coloniale*, 570.

studying public surveys from the review *Sondages*, the official bulletin of the *Institut français d'opinion publique* (IFOP) during the 1940s and 1950s. The indifference to their fate angered servicemen in Indochina and contributed to their slow estrangement from metropolitan society. As General Raoul Salan wrote in his memoirs: "France was far away and little interested... She found this Indochinese affair – that's what it was called – expensive and never ending."<sup>365</sup> Referring to the government former *sergeant-chef*, Pierre Huteau, went even further exclaiming in a letter to his wife during the war: "They don't care about us!"<sup>366</sup>

According to Ruscio's findings, Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh were an unknown quantity in mainland France on the eve of the war. Even when major battles ensued one quarter of those quizzed struggled to comment on the situation. Other issues, such as the price of meat, mattered more. Two years later the fate of the French Union was still barely mentioned in the review. Ruscio has also maintained that his compatriots had traditionally showed little enthusiasm for events outside their home country. Indeed, in 1949 almost twenty percent of those consulted could not name a single overseas territory.<sup>367</sup> Likewise, few believed that WWII had had an influence on the colonies. Equally few thought that Indochina could be lost. Even mounting casualty rates could not really move people. After all, the majority of the dead were not French, anyway.<sup>368</sup>

In view of such unconcern returning soldiers or those on leave felt like strangers and struggled to mingle with their compatriots. As Bigeard mused in his memoirs: "October 1947-February 1948: Four months of leave at home, in Toul, with Gaby and Marie-France [his wife and daughter]. [...] I'm far away from what is happening in Indochina. The newspapers barely mention it. It's a forgotten war. This makes me sad when I think of the heroism of many of my comrades, of my killed lieutenants."<sup>369</sup> The growing estrangement undoubtedly contributed to Bigeard volunteering for a second tour of duty in the Far East, as it did in many other cases.

Among the few interested in the Indochina War, Ruscio has noted a seismic shift over the years. 37% considered it necessary and desirable to re-establish order and send reinforcements to Indochina in 1947. By 1954 (prior to Dien Bien Phu) that figure had slipped to 8%. Like the military, politicians and journalists had clearly underestimated the extent of the conflict. In 1948 the minister for war, Paul Coste-Floret, declared the problems in Indochina as more or less solved. In August 1950 the French assured British observers that they were confident of regaining control of the entire territory, provided the aid demanded was forthcoming.<sup>370</sup>

The greatest shift in opinions occurred between 1953 and 1954, with violent manifestations on society's fringes. At that point it became obvious that Dien Bien Phu would not hold out and

<sup>365</sup> Salan, *Mémoires*, 441.

<sup>366</sup> Written on 18.2.1947 and passed on to me by his daughter, Mme M. D. Huteau-Bidoir. See also the latter's website: <http://md.bidoir.free.fr/Indochine>.

<sup>367</sup> Parallels to Britain are difficult to ignore.

<sup>368</sup> To be precise, the French dead constituted 17% of the total in 1951.

<sup>369</sup> Bigeard, *Ma guerre d'Indochine*.

<sup>370</sup> 'Staff discussions with the French service authorities in Indochina', report by the British delegation on the discussions held in Saigon on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> August 1950. Appendix III, 19.8.1950, NA, FO 959/56.

that the *Plan Navarre*<sup>371</sup> had not achieved its goals. When the end came, 58% of those consulted regarded the results in Geneva as satisfactory “given the circumstances”.<sup>372</sup>

The explanation for such apathy partly lay in France’s political (and societal) structures. Paul Sorum has argued that a small elitist circle, composed of parliamentarians, ministers, writers, journalists, publishers and academics, dictated French politics in the Fourth Republic. Few far-sighted solutions emanated from this group due to governments’ preoccupation with survival. Intellectuals, too, failed to come up with visionary imperial policies. That proved particularly problematic for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which had turned into a fiefdom of the *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (MRP).<sup>373</sup> Its staff had a habit of reading the same newspapers and, as a consequence, adopting the same imperial outlook. The majority opted for a continuing French presence overseas. They did so without spelling out feasible approaches so as not to endanger the government. In other political systems the population (including soldiers) might have interfered. Yet only five percent of French were registered party members. These contented themselves with selecting political candidates based on their ideological orientation. In the voters’ view the task of questioning and engaging politicians fell to the highly respected writers of *L’Express*, *France-Observateur*, *Le Monde* or *Le Figaro*. All of these publications had a relatively limited readership but, crucially, included the vast majority of the political elite.

Interested intellectuals had either an imperialist (and rightist) or an anti-colonial (and leftist) outlook. Importantly, neither group favoured complete decolonisation, struggling to distance themselves from the traditional concept of *mission civilisatrice*. (The only exceptions were the eventually discredited communists and rightist liberals.<sup>374</sup>) The dramatist and former Vichyist, Thierry Maulnier, and the anthropologist and later governor-general of Algeria, Jacques Soustelle, led the first camp. The more numerous second included Albert Camus, Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber<sup>375</sup> and Jean-Paul Sartre. While the imperialists propagated paternalist and nationalist ideas, the anti-colonialists condemned exploitation and pressed for increased development. Yet even they were worried about the economic wellbeing of colonies and the civil liberties of its inhabitants in case of a French exit. Thus, to quote Sorum: “... to ask the intellectuals to support independence was to ask them to change their most fundamental values and beliefs.” Given the inability to envisage a more sovereign future for territories like Indochina and Algeria it is not surprising then that the role of intellectuals diminished after the end of the colonial wars.<sup>376</sup>

<sup>371</sup> See section titled ‘endgame’.

<sup>372</sup> A. Ruscio, ‘L’opinion française et la guerre d’Indochine (1945-1954). Sondages et témoignages’, in *Vingtième siècle. Revue d’histoire*, 1991, vol. 29, no. 29, pp. 35-46.

<sup>373</sup> The MRP constituted France’s first large-scale Christian democratic party after WWII and won the second-most votes (after the communists) in the 1946 elections. It participated in the tripartite coalition until 1947 (when the latter collapsed) and stayed in power until 1951. Its voters came mostly, but not exclusively, from conservative and rural areas, such as the Haute-Savoie and Alsace-Lorraine. Despite boasting influential leaders like Georges Bidault the party could not maintain its parliamentary strength. See Vinen, *France, 1934-1970*, 88-91.

<sup>374</sup> ‘Liberal’ in France means largely pro-business and not necessarily intellectually open.

<sup>375</sup> Servan-Schreiber wrote several articles critical of the campaign in Indochina and, after founding *L’Express*, publicly backed Mendès France’s efforts to end the war. See Dalloz, *Dictionnaire de la guerre d’Indochine*, 228.

<sup>376</sup> Sorum, *Intellectuals and Decolonisation in France*, 5-20, 238-44 (quote on p. 241).



## The impact of WWII

The military failure to recognise the irreversible impact of WWII was partly due to the fairly heterogeneous experiences during the conflict. These inevitably shaped views of the Indochina War and the enemy fought there. Hélié de Saint-Marc, for example, joined the French resistance after the 1940 armistice, was caught by the Gestapo and sent to Buchenwald. Freed barely alive in 1945 he joined the Foreign Legion. He then served three tours in Indochina where he led forces composed of ethnic minorities, as well as elite parachute units of the Foreign Legion. The illustrious personality described in his memoirs the trauma, humiliation and confusion resulting from his imprisonment at Buchenwald. Likewise, he recounted how the Foreign Legion's anonymity and strict discipline offered him an odd sense of comfort. More than imperial preservation in Indochina he wished to get away from war-torn Europe and to re-acquire a sense of self-esteem and aim in life. The views of his superiors, metropolitan politics and the war were to change drastically when he was instructed to pull out of the sector he was commanding. Leaving behind the people who had put their faith in him contributed to his decision to back the military putsch in Algeria.<sup>377</sup>

General Guy Mery for his part was demobbed after the 1940 armistice. He joined the *Armée secrète* in 1943, was arrested by the *Feldgendarmarie* and deported first to Strudthof and later to Dachau. Upon liberation and re-entry into the army he realised that the latter did not recognise the status of deportees, who had fought in the resistance. His career threatened to stall. To re-start it he volunteered for Indochina. To Mery empire seems to have mattered very little. It was only when he joined the French delegation to the international control commission at the end of the war that he was compelled to reflect on the enemy, defeat and France's standing in the world.<sup>378</sup>

This contrasts with the lives of men like the later General François Gérin-Roze who entered the army after WWII. He had experienced the latter through the eyes of a relatively uninvolved teenager and arrived in Indochina without much psychological baggage.<sup>379</sup> The same applied to some degree to seasoned soldiers like the later General Bernard Saint-Hillier. An early member of the Free French he knew hardships and setbacks but ultimately found himself on the winning side. Even in Indochina he was spared the worst. He arrived in Saigon during July 1954. For Saint-Hillier French decolonisation did not become a personal reality until the Suez campaign and the Algerian War.<sup>380</sup>

To put these stories in a wider context we need to look at events during WWII and immediately after. As Alistair Horne has declared, it was during the global clash that the "dilemma of conflicting loyalties and legitimacy opened up" and where the army began to "withdraw within itself". WWII also forced French soldiers to make personal decisions and take initiatives.<sup>381</sup> What counted was

<sup>377</sup> De Saint Marc, *Mémoires*, 59-171.

<sup>378</sup> Interview, 22.10, 6. and 26.11.1996, SHD/DITEEX, 3K 4 – I-VI – (12AV 13-17).

<sup>379</sup> Interview, 21.6.1996, SHD/DITEEX 3K3 – I-II – (12AV 4-5).

<sup>380</sup> Interview, 3., 14. and 21.2 as well as 30.6.1997, SHD/DITEEX, 3K 6 I-VII (12AV 22-3, 29-30 and 105-6) and biography in Lemoine, Simmonet & Laurent, *Histoire orale, inventaire*, 71-6.

<sup>381</sup> Horne, *The French Army and Politics*, 67-71.

not so much discipline but critical analysis, personality and individualism. Applied to a people generally prone to division and turmoil, the result could only turn out to be considerable distinctiveness in perceptions of the Indochina War. WWII also served a major blow to French prestige triggering a fierce wish for rehabilitation. For many within the CEFEO then, WWII stood for defeat, occupation, resistance, betrayal, imprisonment, humiliation, mistrust, hatred and disillusionment. But for a minority it reflected pride, perseverance, heroism and final success.

The unfolding drama was not fully apparent in 1940. Technically, the armistice represented just that and not full-fledged defeat – as the Generals Weygand and Huntzinger stressed. The two men responsible for the negotiations and subsequent adjustments, also reminded everyone that France's air force and the empire had remained largely unaffected. Unoccupied Vichy France was allowed to keep a metropolitan army of fewer than 100,000 servicemen, plus a 120,000-men strong force in Northern Africa. Significantly for the future, those most affected by the armistice were metropolitan officers and NCOs of whom only 4 or 16% respectively remained in the armed forces. But there were also large numbers of conscripts who had always been deemed inferior by imperial regulars. Most of them remained in German POW camps but some joined the Free French and the resistance.<sup>382</sup> Previously imprisoned soldiers – if they later served in the CEFEO – thus carried with them an aura of resignation and humiliation, which would only intensify in Indochina.

Conversely, the myth surrounding de Gaulle has sometimes concealed the true extent of his rebellion against collaboration and that of those who joined him. As he acknowledged himself in his memoirs, the Free French of the early days barely counted 7,000 men, supported by little artillery, plus a handful of ships and submarines.<sup>383</sup> The vast majority of French servicemen followed Marshal Pétain's orders to return to their barracks. In the latter's and Weygand's eyes, de Gaulle should have been executed for his act of treason. However, it was the rebel and not the loyalists who carried the day in the end. This made for a controversial example. Disobedience did indeed become endemic in the French Army after 1940.<sup>384</sup> It helps to elucidate why servicemen developed their own agendas in Indochina.

De Gaulle and his followers were well aware that the armies of North Africa, the Levant and Indochina (after General Catroux's forced departure), plus the air force and fleet (surviving the British attack on Mers-el-Kébir), had stayed in the Vichy realm. The small band of Free French could only continue their struggle with British and later US support. Even so, Africa turned into a battleground between French, most notably in the Franco-British invasion of the Levant.<sup>385</sup> Defeat by Vichy on that occasion left many loyal officers, NCOs and ordinary soldiers deeply resentful while inspiring the Free French.

Anthony Clayton has maintained that the French Army did not just split along unquestioned loyalty versus honour during this period. The physical location of its entities also proved crucial, as did traditions. On the one hand, the factions rallying to de Gaulle in 1940 included units

<sup>382</sup> Nobecourt, *Une histoire politique de l'armée*, 298-301, 306-8 and Clayton, *The French Wars of Decolonization*, 4-5.

<sup>383</sup> C. de Gaulle, *Mémoires de guerre: l'appel: 1940-1942* (1954/2007), pp. 93-100.

<sup>384</sup> Horne, *The French Army and Politics*, 67, 70 and 86.

<sup>385</sup> Thomas, *The French Empire at War*, 105-7.

engaged in the almost successful Norway campaign. A large portion of the Free French also belonged to the *Coloniale* stationed in far-away French Equatorial Africa. This military arm provided twenty-five out of one hundred serving generals at the end of WWII.<sup>386</sup>

More crucial in the context of this chapter are events in Indochina during WWII, of which many in the CEFEO were unaware. After the 1940 armistice and the Japanese advance in East Asia France's highest representative in Indochina, Admiral Decoux (replacing the Gaullist Catroux), faced increasing pressure from Nippon. Calculated Japanese attacks on French bases along the Tonkin-China border alternated with demands to grant transit rights and base facilities. Decoux signed a treaty in September 1940 to satisfy these demands. But more followed, coupled with the seizure of raw material. The Japanese impositions went hand in hand with local uprisings organised by Vietnamese nationalists and communists, all of which the French crushed with determination. Yet France's position further weakened when Thai forces attacked French positions west of the Mekong River in the winter of 1940. Despite successful counter-attacks France had to cede valuable land in Laos and Cambodia, following a Japanese intervention. Things worsened with a special payment deal in December 1942 and a British maritime blockade. All the while, Japanese representatives openly and clandestinely fostered nationalist aspirations to offset the barely tolerated Vichy presence. France's frailty did not escape the local population and intelligentsia, including the communist-dominated Viet Minh. Its cadres managed to survive French and Japanese suppression thanks to a complex, clandestine network, which would serve it well after the war.

Finally, after refusing to accept a Japanese command of French forces, Decoux and his staff were arrested on March 9, 1945. Throughout Indochina Nippon's troops attacked French garrisons, some of which fought courageously but ultimately in vain. Only in the Tonkin 6,000 men under the Generals Sabattier and Alessandri managed to escape via Dien Bien Phu and Yunnan.<sup>387</sup> Undoubtedly, the Japanese coup had a profound impact on these retreating troops and other survivors of the *Armée d'Indochine*, most of whom languished in prisons until the end of the war. For them the restoration and maintenance of French control in Indochina would take precedence over any other aspect. It is only logical for instance that General Alessandri would oppose a French withdrawal from exposed outposts along the Chinese border during the Indochina War. The French collapse also profoundly changed Vietnamese attitudes. As former Viet Minh prison commander, Phmong Van Nguyen, later remarked: "The French colonial regime in Vietnam betrayed us. [...] because they said that they had come to civilise us. They should have protected us. One called that a 'protectorate'. [...] But they [...] raised their hands in front of the Japanese fascists. All this disappointed us. And we realised that we had to do something ourselves."<sup>388</sup>

The French downfall prompted the Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians to declare independence, although the Japanese never transferred all powers. Bao Dai remained Vietnamese emperor while the nationalist Tran Trong Kim became head of a Vietnamese

<sup>386</sup> Clayton, *The Wars of French Decolonization*, 5.

<sup>387</sup> Dalloz, *La guerre d'Indochine*, 44-64 and Thomas, *The French Empire at War*, 191-217.

<sup>388</sup> Albert, *Le silence des rizières*.

government. In Laos, King Sisavang Vong assumed control of the country while Prince Sihanouk did so in Cambodia. Unluckily, famine and inflation accompanied independence, for which the population blamed the new administrations. It is obvious in retrospect that France's nationalist 'allies', particularly Bao Dai, would never enjoy the respect and admiration the largely unscathed Viet Minh could build on. Vice versa, it is fitting that the French would have to rely on groups, such as the Cao Dai sect, that had openly collaborated with the Japanese.<sup>389</sup>

Despite the material difficulties, the Indochinese population experienced life unbothered by the French administration and expatriate community. The Japanese encouraged the re-discovery of pre-colonial traditions and handed over symbolically important government buildings. The ensuing nationalist mood prompted Bao Dai to send a telegram to France warning that the people would not tolerate a re-occupation. The French press ignored it.

Meanwhile, the Viet Minh remained somewhat in the background waiting for their chance. At the time it represented a relatively loose movement, dominated by communists but with only limited influence in the villages, particularly in Cochinchina. It was more solidly implanted in the Tonkin and to some degree in Annam. Their varying strength at that stage goes a long way to explain the final outcome of the Indochina War.

The situation took another dramatic turn between 14 and 25 August, following the Japanese surrender. Viet Minh forces now swept into the towns and cities taking over the administration. There, they harassed and often killed outright collaborators, competing nationalists, notables and French settlers. On 2 September the Viet Minh leader, Ho Chi Minh, declared independence in front of a frenetic crowd and in the presence of American and French authorities. David Marr has summarised the symbolic events as follows:

There was a psychological aspect to the August insurrection(s) in which millions shared. It included a desire for moral purification, the readiness of young people to take initiative (and of older people to follow), a willingness to behave unorthodoxly, to speak directly, to ignore taboos, to refuse to worry about one's personal future or safety. [...] there was a longing to identify with something certain, to find new order in one's soul and throughout the universe. In this context, Viet Minh slogans, songs, and flags both prompted individuals to take unprecedented action and provided a new sense of belonging, which ICP [Indochinese Communist Party] leaders were quick to build upon in subsequent months. Youthful heroics and the wish for order came together in the rush to join self-defence (tu ve) units, where demonstrated initiative and discipline counted for more than social origin, schooling or wealth...<sup>390</sup>

After decades of colonialism, which had caused a widespread feeling of bereavement and desolation,<sup>391</sup> the tables had finally turned. The formerly powerful colonial regime, which had appeared to stay forever, had suddenly vanished. Vice versa, French eye witnesses have kept

<sup>389</sup> *Chroniques d'outre-mer*, no. 9, August-September 1951.

<sup>390</sup> Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 68-9, 149-51, 238-40 and 295-6 (quote on p. 370).

<sup>391</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Anti-colonialism*, 3-6 and 274-6.

dark memories of these days. Yvonne Fontanne, who was a child at the time, deemed the Japanese coup "the beginning of hell".<sup>392</sup>

Meanwhile, the Free French struggled to obtain local information while lobbying London and Washington for intervention. Due to Decoux's crackdown on Gaullists during WWII, vital intelligence was sorely lacking. Martin Thomas has thus concluded that Gaullist policies in regard to Indochina remained unrealistic, improvised and confused. He has quoted the example of the declaration by the commissioner for colonies in the provisory metropolitan government, Paul Giaccobi, on March 14, 1945. In it the latter promised a seemingly new form of imperial French citizenship to the Indochinese. This was to be coupled with political and electoral rights in the future Council of State. Giaccobi also pledged unparalleled employment opportunities. Understandably, the bulk of Vietnamese nationalists rebuffed these overtures.

French veterans of the Indochina War have in some cases accused the US of failing to support France's efforts to re-gain a foothold in Southeast Asia. Previously quoted Ginette Dupont-Subirada stated for example: "We suffered an anti-colonial propaganda stirred by the Americans who preferred the independent-minded terrorism."<sup>393</sup> In many French eyes, General Stillwell and his successor, General Wedemeyer, personified such anti-colonialism. The two led the Allied war effort in mainland East Asia. Neither they nor their superior, President Roosevelt, were prepared to allow the Free French any part in this theatre of war, backing instead Chiang Kai Shek's regional aspirations.<sup>394</sup> Churchill was less disinclined, sensing similar US opposition to British plans for Malaya and Singapore. From 1943 onwards SOE staff (some of which belonged to Force 136) began to cooperate with a newly created French *Service d'action*. The British also tolerated and supported the preparation of a *Corps léger d'Intervention*<sup>395</sup> in India. Meanwhile, the provisional government in Paris dispatched Jean Sainteny to organise the remains of the French troops. Significantly, he was not given a mandate to negotiate with Ho Chi Minh, which he duly ignored.<sup>396</sup>

Like later administrators and generals, Sainteny could have based his talks on the Brazzaville Conference of January 1944 although Indochina was largely excluded from its deliberations. Intended as a review of governmental practices and principles in the empire, it should have produced a modern framework for interaction between Paris and the overseas territories. However, the mostly conservative participants prevented efforts to spell out equality between rulers and ruled, or to draw roadmaps for colonial self-government. The organisers did partly succeed in convincing fellow colonial powers and a highly critical America of France's continuous commitment to its possessions. In reality, the only progressive tangibles were the abolition of forced labour and a future constituent assembly in Paris with seats for colonial representatives.<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Rousselier, *Vietnam*.

<sup>393</sup> [www.anac-fr.com/f\\_2gm.htm](http://www.anac-fr.com/f_2gm.htm).

<sup>394</sup> Captain Raymond Lagier realised the French impasse when he visited French troops in Kun Ming and Dien Bien Phu during 1945. Prevented by the Americans from any actions against the Japanese, his mission left empty-handed. See interview, 27.1.1999, SHD/DITEEX 3K 47 – V – (12AV 337).

<sup>395</sup> 'Light intervention corps'.

<sup>396</sup> Section on Indochina during the war, except passages on Sabattier's retreat and the Vietnamese revolution, based on Thomas, *The French Empire at War*, 199-209.

<sup>397</sup> Shipway, *The Road to War*, 21-40.

It has been argued at the beginning of this chapter that perceptions of insurgents and the insurgency did not necessarily follow the by now traditional periodisation of the war, that is a colonial and an international era. It has further been held that opinions could change over time, depending on events on the ground and personal situations. Nevertheless, it can be helpful to analyse recollections based on those two habitual, historical periods in order to examine to what extent views have followed or differed from them. For simplification the demarcation line shall be drawn at the end of 1949. It marked the birth of the Peoples' Republic of China and the beginning of the latter's systematic support for the Viet Minh.

### Reasserting French control and the nationalist experiment, 1945-1949

Jean-Michel Gaillard has referred to 1946 as the year of the “missed occasions”. Indeed, French troops re-conquered parts of Indochina with relative ease. In so doing they gave politicians and administrators considerable leverage in negotiations with the Viet Minh and other nationalist groups – which was ultimately squandered.<sup>398</sup> In this context it should be borne in mind that between October 1945 and December 1946 the majority of clashes occurred in the south. In the north the Viet Minh's solid implantation demanded a more cautious French approach.

In view of rapid advances in the south and ongoing negotiations in the north, one might expect soldiers to have been relatively optimistic about the military prospects and unsympathetic to negotiations. Indeed, in one of many reports on military morale General Morlière (or his right-hand respectively) declared in December 1946:

It is undeniable that events at the end of November and then at the end of December have again given the troops the confidence, the prestige and the awareness of their important role. Many estimate that the future of the whole of the colonial empire is in their hands. [...] Any new policy vis-à-vis the Annamese [i.e., a strong-handed approach] will undoubtedly be very well received. In contrast, the return to the previous policy of accords would be considered an insult to our deaths whose sacrifice would prove useless if the government desired to continue the previous talks with the “criminals” [...] and accepted taking away from our troops their positions from November.<sup>399</sup>

The problem with this assessment, as with many other official sources, is that it was written (or at least signed) by a general. It is doubtful that soldiers throughout the expeditionary force wholeheartedly shared this view. In reality, first encounters often changed previously held convictions. Even General Leclerc eventually advocated negotiations with Ho Chi Minh.<sup>400</sup> On the other hand, he made Admiral d'Argenlieu aware of the fact that the task at hand was primarily a

<sup>398</sup> J.-M. Gaillard, 'L'année 1946 ou les occasions manquées' in *Les collections de l'histoire*, no. 23, 38-9.

<sup>399</sup> 'Rapport sur le moral des troupes françaises de l'Indochine du nord (TFIN), Décembre 1946-1947, Commandant des troupes françaises en EO-Zone nord, état-major 5<sup>e</sup> bureau, SHD, box 10H 349.

<sup>400</sup> General Georges Buis, who served in Leclerc's small staff, felt that the general knew that the war couldn't be won. Leclerc recognised that there was a popular (Viet Minh) government in Indochina. See interview, 13.3.1998, SHD/DITEEX 3K 27 – V – (12AV 219).

military one and that he as commander should therefore be given wide-ranging powers. D'Argenlieu refused to budge, quoting de Gaulle's instructions.<sup>401</sup>

General Valluy, Leclerc's successor, opposed concessions, convinced that complete victory was only a question of time. Not all his subordinates shared this opinion. General Jean Crepin, who at the time acted as Valluy's adjutant, suggested that the French should offer Ho Chi Minh the government palace in Hanoi as a politically spectacular gesture. His superior refused to sign and pass on to d'Argenlieu a letter containing such a suggestion. Crepin sent it himself but the high-commissioner rejected the idea outright.<sup>402</sup>

Like d'Argenlieu, many stubbornly held on to the notion that French troops merely had to mop up local resistance so as to allow administrators to commence their traditional administrative work. Numerous generals and colonels ordered large-scale sweeps, oblivious to the fact that their enemies simply hid or retreated before returning.<sup>403</sup> The deceptive little victories, achieved without much resistance, confirmed the view that France should not negotiate. Yet among those on the ground doubts began to creep in. Bigeard claimed to have realised the futility of such manoeuvres very quickly.<sup>404</sup> Similar scepticism spread among the lowest levels, hinting at a generational and hierarchical gulf. Robert Dibon's<sup>405</sup> scepticism went beyond military operations. Pointless manoeuvres, brutality, enemy propaganda and pessimistic expatriates prompted him to question the wisdom of the French mission altogether.<sup>406</sup> Even so, Dibon did not necessarily cast doubts on the goal of re-establishing a French presence in some way or another. But he suspected, at least in his memoirs, that this endeavour would turn out to be a very sensitive, complex and arduous affair.

Again, the explanation for these diverging opinions lies to some extent in military experiences prior to Indochina. It is only logical that Bigeard quickly saw through the cat and mouse game in Indochina. After all, he had played it with the Germans during his time in the resistance. On the other hand, officers switching to de Gaulle in 1943 and participating in the Italian and French campaigns can be excused for believing that their classic manoeuvres would inevitably yield results against lowly, colonial opposition. On balance, they had worked against the most fearsome enemy of all, the Germans.

If soldiers had mixed feelings about strategies, attitudes towards the Viet Minh were ambiguous, too, during the first half of the war. This partly owed to the fact that not all insurgents were communists. In the first months French troops also fought religious sects (in the south), other nationalist groups and ordinary pirates and criminals. Regardless of who was involved, either side took few prisoners, and if so only for interrogation. The relatively vicious French

<sup>401</sup> Massu, *Sept ans avec Leclerc*, 230-2. Leclerc's estimation was posthumously accepted midway through the conflict when General de Lattre was appointed both high-commissioner and commander-in-chief.

<sup>402</sup> Interview by P. Vial, 16.6.1995, SHD/DITEEX 4K 2 – I – (12AV 45).

<sup>403</sup> As late as 1953 a General Navarre ordered such a classic operation, described by an enthusiastic TV reporter as a great success. Revealingly, the news feature showed no enemy traces. See 'L'opération Brochet dans le delta tonkinois' in *Les actualités françaises*, 15.10.1953, [www.ina.fr](http://www.ina.fr).

<sup>404</sup> Bigeard, *Ma guerre d'Indochine*.

<sup>405</sup> At the time either a private or a NCO.

<sup>406</sup> Private collection of Robert Dibon, SHD, box 1KT 330. The unpublished memoirs were written decades after his service. As in the case of Bigeard, one can ask whether this wisdom was already present in the early days of the war.

treatment of insurgents implies contempt for an enemy, who did not yet possess the discipline, agility, braveness and perseverance that was to impress later on. But this deficiency is not the only reason for the condescension. During raids servicemen discovered on occasion bound, frightened, tortured and/or massacred men, women and even children, most of them abducted by communist groups. Among the victims figured notables, landowners, administrators and journalists regarded as exploiters and collaborators by the Viet Minh. Due to such scenes the rebels earned a reputation as weak and cowardly thugs. It was a small step from such perceptions to the notorious *interrogations musclées*,<sup>407</sup> followed by swift executions. In turn, French soldiers could expect to endure the same and worse treatment if caught alive.<sup>408</sup>

One unit engaged in these early battles was the *Commando Ponchardier*, led by the captain of the same name. They carried out a series of raids against Viet Minh positions in southern Vietnam during the early stages of the war. If one can believe the writer Jean-Pierre Bernier,<sup>409</sup> the French group hardly suffered any casualties while killing scores of (perceived) Viet Minh.<sup>410</sup> Needless to say, the opposition did not impress the 'tigers'. Bernier has described a successful surprise raid on a Viet Minh hideout and its aftermath as follows:

The surprise is total [...] No organised defence is possible. [...] Some Viets try to resist. Grenade... burst of gunfire. Every time the affair is finished within three seconds. The other Viets prefer to surrender. A small group tries to flee into the rice fields. They run into Barla and his companions who pull the net. [...] Surprise! The runaways tried to take with them a French couple kept as hostages for weeks. Barla discovers that one of the Viets [...] tries to hide [...] the jewels of the female prisoner [...]. The couple, thinned from deprivation, are very emotional. [...] Half a dozen other prisoners are discovered in an infected hideout. Annamese, men, women mixed. In chains, eaten by vermin, they are reduced to the state of skeletons. [...] Every day their gaolers have beaten them for the crime of simply staying loyal to France. All knew they were condemned to a slow death. [...] Without hesitation they point at those who have tortured them day in, day out. The verdict of Ponch is taken. No appeal. 'These here will not be taken with us.'<sup>411</sup>

Such descriptions of early raids and opposition are representative in so much as they have been echoed in Bodin's studies.<sup>412</sup> Yet not everyone gained the same derogatory impression of the enemy. General Massu (then a lieutenant-colonel) found the insurgents, he encountered in southern Vietnam during the first months, tenacious and courageous. He was even more

<sup>407</sup> Literally 'strong-handed' interrogations, in most cases extended beatings.

<sup>408</sup> Marcel Rouby, for instance, who served with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> *Légions de gardes républicaines*, faced the delicate task of collecting the mutilated corpses of two comrades. Two of them, who had been stationed at a post, had had their throats slit. See Thévenet, *La guerre d'Indochine racontée par ceux qui l'ont vécue*, 82. Killing was not always necessary: Traps with spikes and mines had a disastrous effect on French morale. Even killed soldiers still posed a threat. General Le Chatelier, at the time a battalion commander, discovered that the shot driver of an ambushed truck had been fitted with a hand grenade. See General Le Chatelier, *De la forêt laotienne à la forêt noire*, private collection, SHD, box 1KT 442.

<sup>409</sup> He published the account of their operations based on recollections by members of the *Amicale des anciens du Commando Ponchardier*.

<sup>410</sup> They were partly assisted by the British Navy in this.

<sup>411</sup> J.-P. Bernier, *Le commando des tigres: les paras du Commando Ponchardier, Indochine 1945-1946* (1995), pp. 110-20 (quote on p. 113-114).

<sup>412</sup> Bodin, *Les combattants français face à la guerre d'Indochine*, 146-7.



impressed when he landed in the north. When Massu attended a combined parade he apprehensively observed well-instructed Viet Minh units marching past him, cheered on by frenetic crowds.<sup>413</sup> The leadership, too, swayed Massu as it did the eventual historian and journalist Jean Lacouture. The latter met Ho Chin Minh, Giap, Phan Van Dong and others in his role as chief-brigadier of the CEFEO's press service in February 1946. In a later interview he admitted:

I have never hidden the very favourable impression that they made on me. The 'charm' under whose spell I was, [also touched] before and after me, men as unreceptive to communism as Jean Sainteny and General Leclerc, men less young and naïve as me, much more responsible. It is easy today to accuse some and others to have been bewitched by these men and their theories on the eve of this revolution. Of course, we knew that they weren't lambs, that they had blood on their hands: but they used a language if not of peace then at least of reason. And their worry seemed apparent to go towards independence in steps, limiting as much as possible a military confrontation that, besides, could only turn in their favour before long.<sup>414</sup>

While sensing that France would not win any protracted clash, Lacouture appears to have judged the situation as solvable, provided the French and Vietnamese could sort out their differences. Others were under no illusion and prepared for full-scale confrontation. Later General Hugo Geoffrey attributed his survival during the eventual clashes to his ignoring of official directives, which stipulated that soldiers should avoid visible preparations for war. Instead, Geoffrey ordered his position to be fortified, put his men on constant alert and installed heavy equipment. When the assault came, his unit was prepared.<sup>415</sup>

While Geoffrey did not trust the quietness and talks, others were simply bewildered and disappointed in view of the various rounds of talks, proclamations, ultimatums and political turmoil echoing from Saigon, Hanoi and Paris. The previously-cited Robert Dibon was appalled to hear of de Gaulle's resignation in January 1946, believing that only the general would have achieved a solution to the Indochinese problems. Still, in May of the same year he and his colleagues watched hopefully and curiously as French and Vietnamese delegations boarded planes for France. Yet by November they waited anxiously as the ultimatum to the Viet Minh to lay down weapons passed.<sup>416</sup>

High-Commissioner d'Argenlieu for his part could never envision any status beyond internal autonomy for the three Indochinese territories. In parallel he somehow assumed that France could dictate terms. Apart from such Gaullist deliberations, he feared that the more dynamic and numerous Vietnamese would dominate and interfere with the fragile kingdoms of Laos and Cambodia. Cooper has reminded us that such worries were not new. French authorities had

<sup>413</sup> Massu, *Sept ans avec Leclerc*, 260, 273 and 276.

<sup>414</sup> Interview, *Historia Spécial*, no. 28, 122-6 (quote p. 124).

<sup>415</sup> Interview, 14.5.1998, SHD/DITEEX 3K 37 – III – (2AV 249).

<sup>416</sup> SHD, 1KT 330.

justified the 19<sup>th</sup> century conquest of Indochina with the argument that it would pre-empt Siamese aspirations.<sup>417</sup>

D'Argenlieu and like-minded colleagues also felt that the Viet Minh did not possess a political and social monopoly on Vietnam's future, particularly not in the south. Non-communists, notably highland minorities, would not readily accept communist tutelage but, owing to their weakness, they would be forced to do so if the French negotiated exclusively with Ho Chi Minh. D'Argenlieu was confirmed in his view when hundreds of headmen from the Annamese highland, mostly Moi, swore an oath of loyalty to France on June 29, 1946. In view of such support and anti-communism, the French administrative and military authorities were still relaxed about the communist infiltration of the southern plateau as late as summer 1950.<sup>418</sup> Part of that confidence stemmed from Viet Minh actions. In July 1946 they violently rid themselves of nationalist and more conservative competitors, the Dong Minh Hoi and Viet Nam Quoc Zan Dang, leaving other groups in little doubt as to their fate.<sup>419</sup>

Somewhat surprisingly given his influence, Admiral d'Argenlieu, has rarely found his way into the military testimonies exploited for this research. This comes as some surprise because his policy of *faits accomplis* proved crucial in torpedoing any diplomatic attempts to solve the swelling crisis. The declaration of an autonomous Republic of Cochinchina blatantly breached Parisian plans for a popular referendum for instance. D'Argenlieu appears to have been well aware that these steps could only antagonise the communists. Realising that the Viet Minh delegation to the Fontainebleau Conference used the latter to advertise its cause to the media, the public and a sympathetic left, d'Argenlieu also staged a separate conference at Dalat. Further, he instructed French troops to occupy the Moi plateaus of Southern Annam on June 21, 1946. Four days later the French also occupied the government-general in Hanoi. General Valluy, too, demonstrated little interest or faith in negotiations when he ordered French garrison commanders to prepare for military confrontation. Yet none of the witnesses in the research sample has mentioned these provocations. Viet Minh actions, such as an ambush on a French convoy at Lang Son on August 3, seem to have cast a longer shadow.

Meanwhile in Fontainebleau, the Vietnamese delegation suddenly demanded independence not in five, but three years. As a result, the conference ended only with a shaky *modus vivendi*. Max André, who headed the French delegation due to his earlier spell in Indochina, blamed his interlocutors concluding: "Opposite us we never found partners who accepted the slightest concession even on the most minor details. [...] If by chance, under the pressure of our argumentation, our partners accepted whatever point, the next day they came back to what they had agreed with the previous day and everything re-commenced."<sup>420</sup>

The other side of the coin, as Martin Shipway has argued, was that the Fourth Republic was too much embroiled in perpetual crisis, rivalry between administrative centre and periphery too

<sup>417</sup> Cooper, *France in Indochina*, 23-4.

<sup>418</sup> 'Weekly intelligence report no. 9', military liaison officer in Saigon to the War Office, GHQ FARELF and HM Minister in Saigon, 24.6.1950, NA, FO 959/49.

<sup>419</sup> Brocheux & Hémery, *Indochine*, 350.

<sup>420</sup> *Débats, Union Française*, 11.3.1954, LSE, 44 (R26) AUF1.

strong and the ideological framework too vague to offer the Vietnamese anything of coherence and substance.<sup>421</sup>

It was partly with this renewed in-fighting in mind that General Leclerc initially advocated the maintenance of the French Union. In August 1946, after his departure from Indochina, he addressed his old comrades of the 2<sup>e</sup> *Demi-brigade*, arguing:

Two years ago we left this 2<sup>e</sup> DB taking with us above all the conviction that the French, even if they differ in origin, religion and profession could get on, even get on well. It is to safeguard this understanding that we created our house and its numerous branches in France and overseas. But it seems that all that is nothing but a mistake and fantasy. To live normally the French have to dispute, to tear apart, seek to demolish at all cost what constitutes the neighbour. [...] Our comrades did not die for this goal in yesterday's battles of Africa and France. Let's maintain this Union at all costs which constitutes the grandeur of France and let's fight today as yesterday in order not to sink into decadence. This objective, like the ones of yesterday, can be achieved.

In January 1947 the same man struck a more realistic tone, maintaining that: "The solution [in the Indochinese conflict] can only be political. France can no longer suppress a group of twenty-four million inhabitants by [the use of] arms. We have to deal with an awakening xenophobic nationalism and to direct it in order to safeguard the rights of France."<sup>422</sup>

While Leclerc advocated military operations in order to enhance France's position in future negotiations, his successor, General Valluy, pressed for the complete destruction of Viet Minh forces. In his view the traditionally passive and flexible population would quickly shift allegiances following inevitable French successes.<sup>423</sup> Yet Émile Bollaert, who had replaced d'Argenlieu in March 1947, sensed the need for renewed discussions. Perhaps he already detected a dangerous, emerging pattern: French commanders could never agree on whether to concentrate forces in the heart of the insurgency, the Tonkin, or whether to fully pacify Cochinchina so as to have a basis for future incursions into the north.<sup>424</sup>

While historians have labelled 1945 to 1949 the colonial phase, the Cold War was already taking shape in France (and the world in general). This development had repercussions for soldiers on the spot and has coloured opinions. But interpretations varied depending on political leanings and individual situations. Conservative officers began to worry about the increasing influence of the French Communist Party (PCF) – with good reason. Contrary to other factions, the PCF had emerged from WWII with a heightened prestige due to the prevalence of its members in the resistance. A noticeable percentage of newly recruited soldiers thus harboured some sympathies for the movement. Having replaced the SFIO (socialists) as the party of the workers the PCF won 28% of votes in 1946. It eventually reached a basis of 300,000 registered

<sup>421</sup> Bulk of information on negotiations taken from Shipway, *The Road to War*, 200-21 and 273-9.

<sup>422</sup> *Voix du combattant* (UNC), December 1947 and July 1954, UNC (Paris).

<sup>423</sup> Even Valluy came to realise the naivité of such assessments while contributing to the production of *Radiodiffusion Française* in February 1951. In it he highlighted the scarcity of French resources, the vast land to be controlled and the fluid nature of the war. See *Chroniques d'outre-mer*, no. 4, April 1951.

<sup>424</sup> Brocheux & Hémery, *Indochine*, 351-5.

voters, making it the largest party in the political landscape. If one adds the considerable circulation of associated newspapers, *Humanité* and *Ce Soir*, as well as the 5.5 million members of the *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT) and those of the popular *Jeunesse républicaine de France* (UJRF), the influence appears even greater. The mass appeal of the party owed in part to the difficulties of life in France after the war, which also drove many young men into the military.

Yet on April 19, 1946 voters rejected the proposed constitution, which the left had strongly shaped. On June 2 the PCF also lost its parliamentary majority. In the context of the Indochina War the party suffered from the fact that its ministers were absent from the government during the decisive days in November and December 1946. When they took up ministries they became indirectly associated with France's policies in Southeast Asia.<sup>425</sup> To some extent this was justified because the party never disagreed with a French presence in Indochina per se. Furthermore, its five ministers occupied important roles in the government from January 1947 on. The party leader, Maurice Thorez, acted as vice-president while François Billoux took up the post of defence minister. The leadership argued that their governmental presence ensured France's neutrality in an increasingly bipolar world. But this meant that they could only abstain from voting on military credits for the war rather than actively opposing it. Contrary to members of other parties, communist politicians regarded Ho Chi Minh as a representative of a legal government. Consequently, they pressed for negotiations, predicting that the alternative would result in a long and costly war. Sympathetic voters and activists, who tended to be most sensitive to the war, largely shared this attitude.

The communist balancing act was not to last. On April 16, 1947, communist ministers withdrew from a governmental council reunion in protest against French repression in Madagascar. Tensions heightened when General Salan publicly (and perhaps intentionally) stated that the military's offensive in Indochina during October 1947 was in line with governmental orders. On May 5 Ramadier finally bowed to pressure from the right and dismissed the communist ministers from the government. Ironically, the issue was not Indochina but communist sympathy for strikers at the Renault factory.

Freed from governmental constraints the PCF could now openly attack the war and the CEFEO. Not that the communists were opposed to an army as such. But the expeditionary corps represented the contrary of what they had envisioned, namely a popular and neutral force firmly embedded in the republic. When the right accused the communists of backstabbing the army, the latter responded that they were actually standing up for the forces and their reputation. The PCF particularly objected to the dispatching of conscripts and may have contributed to the government's decision not to involve the latter in the Indochina War. Claiming concern over the army's prestige, communists pointed at the increasing cases of pillaging, torture and indiscriminate killings by the CEFEO (thereby ignoring that the Viet Minh did just the same). They

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A point not lost on the military: Although mostly referring to the socialists General Geoffrey highlighted in his interview that it had been the left that had "ordered, commanded, decided" (on) the Indochina War, the Suez campaign and the Algerian War. Interview, 14.5.1998, SHD/DITEEX, 3K 37 – IV – (12AV 250).

felt that their opposition would prevent ordinary soldiers from becoming 'criminals' and being implicated in what they now called the '*sale guerre*'.<sup>426</sup>

At times the party's basis went further. In January 1947 dock workers in Marseille refused to load war material destined for Indochina. Activists also started to hold counter-demonstrations near recruitment offices, distributed leaflets in the barracks (via sympathetic soldiers) and organised meetings between returning and newly enlisted servicemen. In December 1948 the *Mouvement des combattants de la liberté et de la paix* was founded. Most controversially, mobs pelted returning servicemen, even wounded ones, with stones. In military factories communist employees intentionally damaged material earmarked for Indochina, particularly parachutes. Although actual cases of sabotage were less frequent than conservative circles have stated, such stories reverberated in Indochina, where they infuriated combating troops and administrators.<sup>427</sup> The latter were also much less impressed by the fate of Henry Martin than were large sections of French society.<sup>428</sup>

In defence of the party's leadership it has to be stated that it did not lend active support to French soldiers harbouring communist sympathies. The official line dictated that they should depart for Indochina, learn the military trade and 'behave like communists' (i.e., spread the party's ideas among the troops). While the Viet Minh accepted this stance French soldiers on the spot were left to fend for themselves, unable to establish networks. This held particularly true for those who lived in isolated posts. Many chose to avoid combat so as to spare lives on both sides. Some tried to get in contact with the official enemy – a practice violently condemned by the party's leadership. About 300 French deserted becoming propagandists and translators in the Viet Minh's service.<sup>429</sup> One of the most famous cases involved the later historian Georges Boudarel. He was found out in 1991 when an Indochina veteran and former prisoner of war recognised the ex-political commissar during a lecture. The former serviceman accused Boudarel of ordering tortures of French POWs. Following this encounter the socialist minister of education, Lionel Jospin, declared Boudarel unworthy of being a professor. Subsequent lawsuits, though, came to nothing.<sup>430</sup>

Boudarel could still count himself lucky. Fellow soldiers liquidated some suspected or open communist sympathisers within the expeditionary corps. Some of those who survived the war joined the *Association nationale des rapatriés d'Indochine et familles des victimes*. It was founded

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<sup>426</sup> 'Dirty war'.

<sup>427</sup> Alain de Lacoste-Laraymondie, who worked as a civilian in de Lattre's staff, learned that French-made pincers had been found among killed Viet Minh. See Interview, 21.10.1997, SHD/DITEEX, 3K 23 – I – (12AV 136).

<sup>428</sup> Martin had served in Indochina and was stationed in Toulon after his tour. There, he began to distribute anti-war leaflets and assisted with the sabotage of a ship. Arrested in March 1950 he was condemned to five years in prison. But the case had to be taken up again because of procedural mistakes. The PCF jumped on the occasion and made his case widely known. The campaign paid off to the extent that President Vincent Auriol pardoned Martin in August 1953. See: Dalloz, *Dictionnaire de la guerre d'Indochine*, 149. Martin himself later argued that not he had violated the law but the government by tolerating that the army attacked civilians in Indochina. See: Albert, *Le silence des rizières*.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid. Others, like the non-combatants 'André' and 'Roland', were sent by the PCF to Vietnam to advise the Viet Minh on propaganda.

<sup>430</sup> P. Brocheux, 'Le cas Boudarel' in *Les collections de l'histoire*, no. 23, 62-3.

in 1949 to demand peace and the departure of the expeditionary corps. In addition its members attempted to convince young soldiers not to volunteer for the war.<sup>431</sup>

Despite the PCF's relative influence and growing agitation, its impact on members of the CEFEO has probably been overblown. Many veterans only read about the political clashes in the newspapers,<sup>432</sup> learned from newly-arrived colleagues, or experienced demonstrations upon their return. Neither the expulsion of communist ministers from the government nor Henri Martin's case have surfaced much in testimonies. Reported cases of communist soldiers expressing their opinion, resisting orders, deserting or collaborating with the Viet Minh are equally rare. Among the veterans studied, only Robert Dibon recalled colleagues who openly expressed their sympathy for the Viet Minh or their anger at the war respectively.<sup>433</sup>

Much of this section has been concerned with the months between 1945 and 1946 when clashes in the south contrasted with the tension-ridden but relative calm in the north. The remaining years of the war's first half were marked by open, if limited, war and the absence of negotiations with the Viet Minh. Thereafter, favourable (soldierly) feelings towards the communists, where they had existed, appear to have faded. This also had to do with the still relatively weak resistance. Despite the initial surprise attack by the Viet Minh in December 1946, the professional and technically superior French forces quickly gained the upper hand.<sup>434</sup>

During the ensuing operations interactions between auxiliaries and their French commanders often led to deep mutual respect. It reinforced the conviction that the communists did not represent a majority. Later Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Denis commanded such troops, which were stationed southwest of Lang Son, during this period. He felt that his men were "100% Francophile". This faithfulness, knowledge of the area and military skill resulted, according to Denis, in the complete pacification of the area. For him and others in similar roles it was difficult to understand how the situation could worsen to the extent it did over the years.<sup>435</sup>

The question why the French quickly gained terrain but ultimately squandered their advantage also occupied the Americans, who were to take up the baton in Indochina. One military analyst found that the French gave up the pursuit of the Viet Minh once they reached the foothills of the north-western mountains. He gained the impression that they presumed that the rebels would die from hunger and fatigue. In reality, the insurgents regrouped while improving technical abilities, discipline and equipment.<sup>436</sup> If true, one cannot help wondering if decade-old stereotypes played into this. As Aldrich has noted: "In most European views [...] Indochinese were physically weak, sickly and deficient in virility [...] lazy, inconstant, lacking in foresight, [...] addicted to

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<sup>431</sup> Passages relating to the PCF, except the section on Boudarel, 'André' and 'Roland', based on A. Ruscio, *Les communistes français et la guerre d'Indochine, 1944-1954* (1985), pp. 29-39, 160-196, 362-379 and Dalloz, *La guerre d'Indochine*, 163-71.

<sup>432</sup> Veteran and then Lieutenant-Colonel Jacques Britsch filled his memoirs with acid remarks about the frequent strikes in France. See *La vie quotidienne à Hanoi au temps de Dien Bien Phu: journal du Tonkin, 1953-1954*, private collection, SHD, box 1K 705.

<sup>433</sup> SHD, box 1KT 330.

<sup>434</sup> Still, the extent of fighting and destruction in Hanoi for instance boded badly for the future and produced grim faces on the visiting minister for overseas France, Marius Moutet. See 'Premières vues authentiques des événements d'Indochine', *Les Actualités Françaises*, 16.1.1947, [www.ina.fr](http://www.ina.fr).

<sup>435</sup> Interview, 5.8.1998, SHD/DITEEX 3K 41 - II - (12AV 282).

<sup>436</sup> Colonel J. F. McQuillen, 'Indochina', in the *Marine Corps Gazette* (January 1955), Liddell Hart Military Archive, LHI 15/5/487.

gambling and opium, vain, given to bragging and cruel.”<sup>437</sup> At the same time, the apparently over-confident attitudes betray an unfamiliarity with historical precedents. Knowledge of French setbacks in 1872/3, 1883 and 1885 might have made French commanders more cautious. Troubles during these occasions had led to the fall of the Parisian government, then headed by the imperial enthusiast Jules Ferry.<sup>438</sup> History was to repeat itself when the Fourth Republic crumbled, following defeat in Indochina and the outbreak of the Algerian War.

In fairness, it needs to be added that the lack of resources played an important part. It was already obvious to the French military prompting various complaints. Sufficient troops would have allowed to chase the Viet Minh while clearing the territories conquered. As it was, the forces were too thinly spread for either task to be fully accomplished. It came as some consolation that the opposition at least appeared not to be faring much better. General Salan judged that the Viet Minh leadership was rudderless and that the movement's structures had been broken after the CEFEO's initial onslaught. As a consequence, many military and political personalities still hesitated to label the conflict a war – even less so as groups hitherto allied with the Viet Minh had broken ranks. This especially applied to the southern sects and their private armies. Equally, catholic communities began to turn away from the communists, following the pope's encouragement to do so. The fact that, as a result, so many Indochinese fought on the French side has prompted Jacques Dalloz to label the conflict in Southeast Asia a civil war<sup>439</sup> – an opinion shared by many French servicemen.

The period between 1947 and 1949 saw a number of other crucial, political and military developments. But one can ask whether they directly affected those on the spot. Most likely, health, climate, equipment, rations or encounters with the opposition weighed heavier. As regards the general, military situation, the French held on to the main axes of communication but suffered growing casualties through ambushes. On the whole, their control remained superficial even during the day, while the Viet Minh ruled during the night. The stalemate was accompanied by an increasingly vicious cycle of violence. Captured French soldiers suffered horrific tortures and deaths deemed “not from this century” by colleagues who found them. Resulting hatred led to indiscriminate killings, which pushed villagers into the arms of the revolutionaries.<sup>440</sup> As in the case of Malaya, disturbing images eventually began to appear, showing French soldiers holding severed heads and executing prisoners.<sup>441</sup>

Over time it became evident that some kind of concessions were needed to satisfy local sentiments and gain more allies. As a consequence the French authorities sought a formula that would appease the non-communist nationalists but guarantee a strong French presence. Arduous negotiations eventually lead to the establishment of three nominally sovereign states within the French Union in 1949.<sup>442</sup> Yet vital matters, i.e. military, diplomatic and economic domains, rested in French hands. Even the border and monetary union, merging Laos, Cambodia

<sup>437</sup> Aldrich, *Greater France*, 201-2, based on P. Guiral & E. Temime, *L'idée de race dans la pensée politique française contemporaine* (1977), pp. 228 and 232-4.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 80-1.

<sup>439</sup> J. Dalloz, 'Des combattants indochinois contre le Vietminh' in *Les collections de l'histoire*, no. 23, 50-1.

<sup>440</sup> Both paragraphs based on Dalloz, *La guerre d'Indochine*, 130-3 and 141-155.

<sup>441</sup> Albert, *Le silence des rizières*.

<sup>442</sup> Vietnam's nominal independence even made it into *The Times* on March 9.3.1949.

and Vietnam, remained under French control. This might explain why the creation of the three states echoed little within the military's lower strata. Even someone working for the propaganda services, like Jules Roy, did not refer to specific dates or events when briefly (and dismissively) alluding to the 'Bao Dai solution'.<sup>443</sup> Not without reason. It would take years to build up the national administrations and armies. Even so, their eventual naissance, or rather their failure to live up to expectations, would make itself felt on the ground.

Both French and Indochinese authorities were fully aware of the ambiguities involved in the new situation. The problem for the former was that the three states and their populations would not fully commit themselves to the struggle against the Viet Minh as long as France did not cede more power. The French in turn did not deem the Indochinese ready to fully take over. Still and significantly, French soldiers were now fighting for largely independent nations.

### **Internationalisation, large-scale warfare and the end, 1950-1954**

More important to the French and the Indochinese than above nationalist window-dressing was the fact that Mao's troops appeared on the frontier of the Tonkin in December 1949. From then on hitherto mostly moral support turned into massive material and logistical aid. Having been accused for long of old-style imperialism the French could not fail to see the irony in this. During a press conference on October 3, 1951 General de Lattre pointed out that even the US were beginning to see that there was now only one form of colonialism: communism.<sup>444</sup> According to Bodin though, the Chinese arrival did initially not affect French morale to a great extent. But the realisation began to sink in that Indochina was part of a bigger clash, perhaps even a Third World War.<sup>445</sup>

The arrival of the Chinese meant, and most French servicemen were fully aware of it, that 1,400 kilometres existed through which Viet Minh forces could retreat and re-enter at any time. In January 1950 China and the USSR even assumed diplomatic relations with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In parallel, Chinese instructors began to train and organise their southern brethren,<sup>446</sup> restructuring the latter down to the level of brigades. The new regular troops were issued with artillery, mortars and machine guns, putting them on par with French forces.<sup>447</sup> In addition, training centres, rest camps and hospitals were set up out of reach of the French air force. In October 1951 a railway line from Nanning to Nam Quam (near Lang Son) was

<sup>443</sup> J. Roy, *Mémoires barbares* (1989), p. 401.

<sup>444</sup> *Chroniques d'outre-mer*, no. 10, November 1951.

<sup>445</sup> Bodin, *Les combattants français face à la guerre d'Indochine*, 180.

<sup>446</sup> A British liaison officer reported in 1950 that France had learned of an agreement for high-level cooperation, which had come into effect in June 1950. See 'Minutes of staff discussions with the French service authorities in Indo-China held on 16 and 17 August 1950', Annexure 'A', Appendix II to SEC(50)19', 19.8.1950, NA, FO 959/56.

<sup>447</sup> The US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) had dropped over 5,000 weapons to the Viet Minh in 1945, mistakenly assuming that they would be used against the Japanese. The Chinese picked up further, modern US weapons on the Korean battlefields in 1950 and passed them on to their allies. The effect was that the latter were often better equipped than CEFE troops from then on. See Porch, *The French Foreign Legion*, 512, 518 and 528.



completed.<sup>448</sup> If the Viet Minh had previously been forced to hit and run they were now in a position to go on the offensive.

Even before the Chinese advent the northern border had become precarious by the end of the 1940s from a French point of view. The base of Cao Bang could only be supplied by air. General Blaizot planned on evacuating its garrison and others in the north as early as autumn 1949 but was prevented from doing so by High-Commissioner Pignon. The latter felt that it would make a negative impression on the newly associated states. One year later Blaizot's successor, General Carpentier, was given the green light. But "Thérèse", as the plan was called, went badly wrong. In theory troops should leave Cao Bang and be joined by forces coming from the east. All the while, other French units would occupy part of the Thai Nguyen to divert enemy troops.<sup>449</sup> In reality the columns approaching each other fell into ambushes by more numerous Viet Minh forces, resulting in 1,800 dead and wounded as well as 2,500 prisoners. Only 700 exhausted soldiers managed to reach French lines. Panicking, the commander of the northeast territory, Colonel Constans, ordered the evacuation of his headquarters at Lang Son leaving behind heavy artillery and ammunition. In Hanoi French women and children were flown out while French troops hastily cleared two smaller towns nearby.

These events had a profound impact on French soldiers of all ranks – more so than Dien Bien Phu. It was not so much the number of casualties that worried them. But for the first time since the start of the war Viet Minh regiments, backed by artillery and mortars, had overrun entire battalions of French elite troops (and not just indigenous or African ones) in well executed manoeuvres. As Louis Stien, a participant in the battles and subsequent POW, put it: "... it was evident that the war had now changed dimensions: the enemy was numerous, aggressive, well armed, well commanded and reacted rapidly. In addition the intelligence received allowed to measure the overwhelming disproportion of forces to our disadvantage..."<sup>450</sup> While some may still have disputed the national character of the Viet Minh, nobody was left in any doubt as to its military capacity. Despite the debacle and ensuing panic, the French minister responsible for relations with the associated states, Letourneau, quoted a 'witness' who deemed morale "admirable".<sup>451</sup>

After Cao Bang French troops largely lost the military initiative (at least in the north), despite various successful raids and defensive stands until 1954. Worse, roughly one year after the northern disasters they faced a more or less united front composed of the Viet Minh and their Laotian and Cambodian allies, the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Issarak. All the while, French metropolitan governments succeeded each other in rapid succession while engaging in what President Vincent Auriol termed a '*politique des petit paquets*' in regard to Indochina. As Brocheux and Hémery summed up the situation:

<sup>448</sup> Brocheux & Hémery, *Indochine*, 355-6 and 358-60.

<sup>449</sup> As during the build-up of Dien Bien Phu, the international press reported on the French retreat from Cao Bang thereby keeping the Viet Minh updated. See *The Times*, 5.10.1950.

<sup>450</sup> Passage on the northern disasters based on L. Stien, 'La bataille de la RC4, "la route sanglante". Les chinois au secours du Viet-minh' in *Historia Spécial*, no. 28, 40-6 (quotation on p. 43).

<sup>451</sup> *Chroniques d'outre-mer*, no. 1, January 1951.

In the course of the years it became obvious that the French Expeditionary Corps would not achieve victory. The French governments, which succeeded each other from 1950 to 1954 in a climate of repeated parliamentary crisis, all chose not to find solutions to the Indochinese problem, thus leaving a conflict to simmer [...] without giving the latter [French high command] the supplementary means in personnel and material.<sup>452</sup>

In military circles complaints about the lack of a clear stratagem, delays in shipments and the scarcity of resources multiplied. The cadres particularly resented the fashion in which a disinterested France treated the war – best symbolised in the maintenance of the peace-modus. As Jean Marcet wrote in 1951:

Despite the numerous warnings given over several months, she [France] has led a collapsing campaign with a guilty imprudence, waged a war in an atmosphere of peace without wanting to commit the necessary effort to fight an enthusiastic and decided adversary, ready for all sacrifices and morally armed for total war. She has contented herself, in order not to alert a public opinion more preoccupied with its self-interest than with national problems, with a strategy of 'small packages' which has always been, despite its setbacks, that of our enterprises overseas.<sup>453</sup>

As Cooper has outlined, the author's reference to practices in earlier colonial times was justified. France had lacked a coherent policy when regarding the conquest of Indochina. It had been individuals who had carried out the haphazard French take-over and who had suffered many setbacks due to the shortage of funds and equipment. Admiral Rigault de Genouilly for instance had taken Tourane as early as 1858 but had pulled out shortly after due to insufficient forces.<sup>454</sup>

The worsening French position also began to worry the Truman administration, which had come to view (South-)East Asia as a long front in the Cold War. In a report by the US ambassador to France, published by the Foreign Affairs Commission of the US Senate on 29 August 1951, the former stated: "... It is undeniable that if Indochina falls the fall of Burma and Thailand would be inevitable. Nobody could convince me that, shortly after, Malaya would not fall in turn...".<sup>455</sup> The US thus preferred to temporarily prop up a once despised, colonial power, to losing Indochina to communism. Yet it delivered supplies under the condition that the French started setting up and training Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian forces in earnest. Most of all, the US pressed for real independence of the associated states. While the French administration and military welcomed the support, they strongly resented interference on a political level. Especially French officers not only disliked their role as cannon fodder for America but also accused the latter of hypocrisy. They gained the impression that after depicting France and Britain as abusive, colonial powers the Americans would simply attempt to replace the latter to pursue similar economic and

<sup>452</sup> Brocheux & Hémery, *Indochine*, 357-8.

<sup>453</sup> M. Marcet, 'La guerre en Asie' in *Almanach du combattant* (1951), p. 23, UNC.

<sup>454</sup> Cooper, *France in Indochina*, 13.

<sup>455</sup> *Chroniques d'outre-mer*, no. 8, August-September 1951.

military goals – with potentially disastrous consequences for the free world. As General Jean Marchand warned:

Despite their liberalism and their aid to the 'dependent' people in their attempt at national emancipation the United States have incurred on the Asians the same reprobation as the Europeans. The hatred triggered by the colonial regime [...] or by the exploitative economic system applied by the US are now finding other reasons to express themselves. The reshuffling of activities by the Americans in China, their enterprise in Korea, the aid they provide to the nationalists in Formosa and the right they have inscribed in the peace treaty with Japan in order to take under tutelage the islands of Ryou Kyou and Bonin, arouses new resentment. And that animosity is exploited by the frenetic propaganda and passionate denouncing of the eternal 'war-makers' and the 'colonial imperialists'. [...] The [Asian] masses, reduced forever to a precarious existence, flattered by the idea of independence [...] have not hesitated to abandon things in which they had nothing to lose and which, in their eyes, carried the responsibility for their poverty...<sup>456</sup>

Washington's decision to chip in also owed to a new French commander-in-chief, whom many in the Pentagon remembered as an able, energetic and outgoing leader, as well as a colleague in WWII.<sup>457</sup> This man, General de Lattre, used his prestige to successfully lobby Washington for more supplies.<sup>458</sup>

De Lattre astutely presented the French effort in Indochina as a defence of the free world.<sup>459</sup> Opportunities to explain this scheme presented themselves during a series of three (or five) power conferences involving the US, Britain, France and, at times, Australia and New Zealand. Initiated after the beginning of the Korean War, the main goal of these meetings consisted in exchanging intelligence information on Chinese military bases, capacities and movements so as to anticipate a second Maoist attack. For France and Britain these conferences also represented chances to advertise their counter-insurgency efforts in Southeast Asia – or to publicly question each other's campaigns and infrastructures.

One of the talks took place in Singapore between December 10 and 12, 1952. The protocol reveals that among the participants the French delegation was keenest on the exchanges. Perhaps sensing this, the conference's British president opened the conference by stating that: "The capital importance of these reunions results from the fact that the military problems in this theatre of operations constitutes a whole. The allies can combat separately in Korea, in Indochina, in Malaya but the enemy wages a single battle...." In retrospect one wonders though if such expressions went beyond mere diplomatic niceties. The French, headed by Colonel Gracieux, pressed for an intensified cooperation in view of an ever more costly war in Indochina. Gracieux

<sup>456</sup> General J. Marchand, 'Concepts et buts stratégiques en Extrême-Orient' in *Almanach du combattant* (1952), 56, UNC.

<sup>457</sup> References to the US, except archival sources, based on Brocheux & Hémery, *Indochine*, 345-62, 356-7 and 360.  
<sup>458</sup> During a press conference on 26 September 1951 de Lattre expressed his satisfaction about the reception he received in the US, the growing American interest and concrete promises for deliveries. See *Chroniques d'outre-mer*, no. 10, November 1951.

<sup>459</sup> Even the British appeared to sense that "... the defence of Tonkin was directly related to the defence of Malaya." See 'Minutes of staff discussions with the French Service Authorities in Indochina held on 16. and 17.8.1950, Annexure 'A', Appendix II to SEC(50)19, 19.8.1950, NA, FO 959/56.

was particularly concerned about specific intelligence on Chinese air forces stationed near the Tonkin, pointing out that they could easily attack and destroy French installations. But the British participants seemed hesitant to commit themselves beyond intelligence sharing.<sup>460</sup> (Vice versa, the French put a question mark behind the British ability to defend Hong Kong.<sup>461</sup>) They sensed that the picture presented by the French delegates was not entirely in sync with the reality on the Indochinese ground. Past experiences played into this.<sup>462</sup>

It is doubtful that French combatants themselves would have endorsed their representatives' sometimes rather glowing reports. To some extent the positive mood of the former stemmed from the partial reversion of fortunes after de Lattre's arrival. Acting as high-commissioner and commander-in-chief he infused hope and even fervour into a cadre still traumatised by the horrific events of October 1950. The change in atmosphere appears to have been felt on every level and transformed opinions – if only temporarily.<sup>463</sup> Suddenly it appeared as if French troops in the Tonkin might withstand further attacks and that there would be a French future in the area. Yet the general himself remained realistic. He did not believe in complete victory but merely aimed to obtain strong cards in the inevitable negotiations to follow.<sup>464</sup>

But what exactly did de Lattre do to change the picture? First, he stood in front of his men and told them that from now on they would "be commanded".<sup>465</sup> Second, he stopped the general retreat in the north and ordered instead that the area be held.<sup>466</sup> Third, he oversaw the construction of a long line of concrete blockhouses whose function it was to halt larger Viet Minh incursions. Fourth, he demanded and received important reinforcements from France. Fifth, de Lattre convinced Bao Dai to appoint a defence minister who could assist the general in forming and extending a Vietnamese Army – a task neglected by previous commanders.<sup>467</sup> This step meant in essence a Vietnamisation of the war effort and thus hinted at an eventual French departure. The general made his beliefs and intentions clear during a now famous rally at the Saigonese Lycée Chasseloup-Laubat on July 11, 1951. On that occasion he sought to attract young Vietnamese for the new force by declaring:

Be men! That is, if you are communists, join the Viet Minh. Over there, there are individuals who fight well for a bad cause. But if you are patriots, fight for your country because this war

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<sup>460</sup> Telegram, 'Procès verbal de la 4<sup>e</sup> réunion de la conférence tripartite (sur) le renseignement, Singapour, 10-12 Décembre 1952', commandement en chef en Indochine, EMEFT to colonel, chef du 3<sup>ème</sup> bureau du PT EMIFT', (presumably written shortly after the conference) SHD, box 10H 149.

<sup>461</sup> 'Procès verbal de la conférence de Pearl Harbour du 10 au 12 Juin 1953 - sommaire française', probably by the leader of the French delegation and written shortly after the conference, SHD, box 10H 151.

<sup>462</sup> A telling handwritten note (by unknown) cited British worries about the absence of French planning in case of a Chinese attack. While acknowledging "the French genius for brilliant improvisation" the author reminded of the breakdown in 1940. See 'Record of a conversation with General Carpentier and Major-General Poett after dinner on the 16 August 1950', appendix IV to SEC(50)19, 19.8.1950, NA, FO 959/56.

<sup>463</sup> The relativity is exemplified in the testimony of Yves de Sesmaisons, who commanded a company of Moroccan *tirailleurs* during the battle of Vinh Yen in 1951. In the face of relentless Viet Minh attacks his unit appeared like an island in a turbulent sea. See Thévenet, *La guerre d'Indochine racontée par ceux qui l'ont vécue*, 145-50.

<sup>464</sup> Interview with General Alberic Vaillant, 15.5.1997, SHD/DITEEX, 3K 13 – VII – (12AV 87) Vaillant served in Indochina as captain/*chef de bataillon*. For a full but strikingly benevolent review of de Lattre's life see the obituary in *The Times* 12.1.1952.

<sup>465</sup> *Chroniques d'outre-mer*, no. 1, January 1951.

<sup>466</sup> The general demonstrated his will to stand and fight by leaving his wife in Hanoi after others had evacuated theirs. See G. Greene, *Ways of Escape* (1999), p. 157.

<sup>467</sup> Clayton, *The Wars of French Decolonization*, 60-3.

is yours. It only concerns France within the limits of its promises to Vietnam and within the part which she intends to contribute to the defence of the free universe. There has not been an enterprise of lesser interest for France since the crusades. This war, whether you like it or not, is Vietnam's war for Vietnam. And France only wages it for you if you wage it for her.<sup>468</sup>

Officially to emphasise his earnestness, de Lattre persuaded his son to command Vietnamese troops. When the latter died in battle the general did not cease to highlight the personal sacrifice – to the annoyance of other servicemen who had also lost relatives in the war. Graham Greene, reporting on the conflict, claimed in his memoirs that Bernard de Lattre had entertained a relationship with the emperor's mistress. His posting in dangerous territory served to end the embarrassing liaison.<sup>469</sup>

In military terms de Lattre stabilised the situation and to some extent even reversed it. During the battles of Vinh Yen, Mao Khe, Ninh Binh, Nghia Lo and Hoa Binh French forces inflicted heavy casualties on the Viet Minh, sometimes with the help of napalm.<sup>470</sup> These successes undoubtedly raised French spirits. Yet some men would later criticise de Lattre for immobilising French troops in ineffective fortifications.<sup>471</sup>

General Simon, at the time a young officer, witnessed the changing times and underlying problems of the French expeditionary force during his voyage to, and in his assignments in, Indochina. While passing through the Suez Canal he detected signs of local hostility towards the British garrison. A stopover in Djibouti led him to muse on the fruits of French colonialism without which, in his opinion, the territory would be void. In Ceylon he admired the British mansions but also sensed the restiveness of nationalism. Upon his arrival in Saigon he quickly realised the proximity of war while dining to the sound of guns. During his short stay in the city Simon watched a parade marking Vietnamese independence. To his consternation no one applauded. When he took up the command of a small post near Saigon he was soon forced to make room for an officer school of the Vietnamese army. The latter's fragility became apparent when several of Simon's Vietnamese soldiers/auxiliaries deserted the post. Other problems that beset his base included poor facilities and the difficulty of seizing a barely visible enemy.<sup>472</sup> (Although Simon's recollections entail interesting judgements on France's role in Indochina and the wider world one can ask whether the young version of the same man was fully aware of all the issues raised in his writings. One suspects that the day-to-day running of his post and successive tasks occupied him to an extent that left little time for political pondering. At least part of the latter might in reality represent a product of later digestion.)

Despite the relatively successful *année de Lattre*, it remained roughly a year due to the general's faltering health. His successors oversaw a steady deterioration of the military and political situation. It became abundantly clear to most involved that the CEFEQ, even if assisted by auxiliaries, the national armies and the US, could not win the war.<sup>473</sup> Yet even during its final

<sup>468</sup> Dalloz, *Histoire de la guerre d'Indochine*, 192-3.

<sup>469</sup> Greene, *Ways of Escape*, 157-8.

<sup>470</sup> Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 37-8.

<sup>471</sup> Bodin, *Les combattants français face à la guerre d'Indochine*, 255.

<sup>472</sup> G. Simon, *Chroniques de Cochinchine, 1951-1956* (1995), pp. 11-22 and 69-78.

<sup>473</sup> In an article published on 5.5.1950 *The Times*' correspondent spoke of a deadlock as early as May 1950.

weeks individual servicemen felt that more resources and visionary leadership could keep the Viet Minh at bay and France in Indochina. Neither Dien Bien Phu nor other setbacks could implant the realisation in these minds that France's days in Indochina were numbered militarily, administratively and ideologically. As Cooper stated: "... even in defeat, belief in the French colonial doctrine remained strong".<sup>474</sup>

French servicemen, who took a closer look, apprehended that the Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian governments did not enjoy sufficient popular support to represent a genuine alternative to the Viet Minh. This was in no small part due to the ongoing French refusal to loosen the leash.<sup>475</sup> That Paris had never really offered full sovereignty became evident following the metropolitan devaluation of the Indochinese *piastre* in May 1953. The measure was sensible from a purely monetary point of view and curbed to some extent the notorious *trafic des piastres*.<sup>476</sup> But it rudely reminded the three Southeast-Asian governments of the limits the French Union imposed on national sovereignty. For French soldiers it meant that they could buy even less with their already meagre pay – a fact that further alienated them from the metropolitan government.

Those French who commanded or trained Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian servicemen – and they became increasingly numerous – experienced the worsening situation on a daily basis. One of them was Jacques Britsch. Waiting for his battle orders throughout much of his spell he had ample time to reflect on the situation in Indochina, France and the wider world. He evoked the early months of his tour when it had felt safe to roam the streets despite the sound of gunfire. The feeling of relative safety might have contributed to his lambasting of Reynaud, Bidault and Mitterrand for wanting (in his view) to sell out and negotiate. In turn, he enthusiastically and in great detail described Christian celebrations in Hanoi (carried out by Vietnamese), which in his view were visible manifestations of France's successful colonisation. This contrasted with the situation in France where, in his view, socialists and communists constantly advocated shorter working hours in exchange for higher wages. There as in the empire, Britsch clearly longed for a strong hand, as shown in the deposition of the sultan in Morocco. He further reflected on the rebellion in Madagascar between 1947 and 1949. All this brooding however never developed into a full understanding of gradual French decolonisation.

As regards Indochina, Britsch became increasingly concerned about attitudes and actions of nominal allies. In his diaries he described how the Muong minority had ceased to believe in French victory, prompting the author to fear desertions. By the same token he was more and more convinced that the new Vietnamese Army would not fight without French supervision. He even worried that Vietnamese soldiers would turn on their French officers, and that entire units would battle each other. His views were equally negative in regard to the political situation. The Vietnamese rejection of the French Union later in the war compounded his pessimism in regard

<sup>474</sup> Cooper, *France in Indochina*, 4.

<sup>475</sup> The French official view was that they had granted independence after the Pau Conference in 1950 at the latest. Even journalist Nguyen Quoc Hoi confirmed after the negotiations in the *Echo du Vietnam* that Vietnamese demands had been fully met. He therefore concluded that the population could no longer sit on the fence. See *Chroniques d'outre-mer*, no.1, January 1951.

<sup>476</sup> In 1945 the Indochinese *piastre* was fixed at the rate of 17 francs in France but exchanged for seven to ten francs on Asian markets. Unsurprisingly, businessmen, corrupt administrators, Indochinese politicians and even the Viet Minh made considerable profits from money transfers. Not until 1953 did the French press reveal the busy traffic in earnest. From Dalloz, *La guerre d'Indochine*, 161-3.

to France's future in the region. To reduce French exposure and to concentrate forces Britsch advocated a departure from Cambodia, even though he had little confidence in Prince Sihanouk. He showed more concern in the case of the relatively loyal Laos in light of Viet Minh reprisals against collaborators. In this context he learned about the case of a Vietnamese notable who had been condemned to death for taking up arms against the communists in 1946. Not satisfied with this, the Viet Minh had also turned his children into coolies. In view of such an enemy it was clear for Britsch why the French were holding out: "Munich plus Dunkirk! Thank you. 1940 is enough."

The officer indirectly criticised the US for not contributing troops but was somewhat pleased about the trump card this gave the French: through the threat of departure they could maintain the flow of equipment. This insight did not stop him from deploring the US failure to understand the true nature of the French presence, i.e. protection rather than mere exploitation. Did it not say everything that a Vietnamese customs officer could strip-search French soldiers? Such theoretical deliberations could not deflect from the steadily deteriorating news from Dien Bien Phu. Similarly upsetting for Britsch were rumours that the French and the Vietnamese authorities were contemplating separate negotiations with the enemy.<sup>477</sup>

Even before Dien Bien Phu, the war had begun to affect areas that had hitherto remained relatively calm – prompting corresponding French and Asian reactions. An official French résumé presented during the tripartite conference in Pearl Harbour in June 1953 drew listeners especially to the problem of Laos. After the setbacks in the Tonkin delta during de Lattre's reign the Viet Minh had turned their attention to the northwest, where the territory proved more favourable to their mobility. While northeast Laos had served as a sanctuary for the Pathet Lao, the centre continued to stay relatively loyal to the French. However, a determined Viet Minh invasion could easily topple the government. Likewise, the situation in Cambodia had worsened in that Prince Sihanouk was facing increasing pressure not only within parliament but also from the Khmer Issarak and its Viet Minh allies.<sup>478</sup> What worried the French presenter at the conference even more was the fact that despite heavy casualties, the enemy always seemed to re-fill its ranks without much difficulties.<sup>479</sup>

Despite sharing this concern, General Henry Navarre envisioned a defence of the Tonkin delta, coupled with the mopping up of the south. The scheme took on the label *Plan Navarre* although some voices questioned even at the time whether such a well-defined plan had ever existed.<sup>480</sup> Regardless of such doubts, Navarre could never implement all aspects as he was denied the necessary means.<sup>481</sup> Faced with such constraints and the various parties involved in the war the general later highlighted France's dilemmas in the area with a clarity that eluded him on the battlefield:

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<sup>477</sup> SHD, box 1K 705.

<sup>478</sup> The situation in the territory had long presented itself as very chaotic. Defections and alliances alternated both within political and military factions. See 'Weekly Intelligence Summary', no. 3, Military Liaison Officer Saigon to the War Office, GHQ FARELF and HM Minister, 6 May 1950, NA, FO 959/49.

<sup>479</sup> 'Résumé de la situation en Indochine' (procès verbal de la conférence de Pearl Harbour du 10 au 12 juin 1953), délégation française, June 1953, SHD 10H 151.

<sup>480</sup> In a speech to the parliament of the French Union depute André Bidet suggested that the general had never conceived it. See *Débats, Union Française*, 11.3.1954.

<sup>481</sup> Brocheux & Hémery, *Indochine*, 362.

France, the associated states and the USA [...] formed a coalition against a common enemy [...] but none of the coalition partners considered this enemy and the goals of the war [...] from the same angle. For the US [...] the goal of the war was the same as in Korea: the 'containment' of communism in Southeast Asia. [...] For the associated states the goal of the war was the elimination of the internal enemy [...]. But at the same time they wanted that out of the war resulted the 'independence', that is a more or less complete rupture of links which united them with France [...] As for France, she no longer knew why she was fighting. [...] It was no longer a matter of re-conquering a part of its colonial empire. So why was she continuing the struggle? Was this [...] 'to liberate the associated states from the Viet Minh and to give them independence'? That was a good reason for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia but it could only be one for France if the independence of the three countries meant their maintenance within the French Union [...] Another perceivable goal of the war for France was to simply participate in the American policy of 'containment' [...]. She would have renounced all national advantage in Southeast Asia and accepted pulling out at the end of the war [...] Between these two possible war aims there was incompatibility as each corresponded to a different political line and even a different strategy.<sup>482</sup>

It does not seem to have occurred to the general that solutions could have flowed from the associated states, given that they knew the enemy better than the French. Yet, as Clayton has explained, such thinking would have gone against the traditional French conviction that initiatives had to originate from the centre, i.e. Paris, and then spread to the periphery. Those directives were not to be questioned. Compromise was not an option.<sup>483</sup>

On the other hand, Navarre was justified when he berated the metropolitan government for lacking a clear strategy. He had probably less reason, as he claimed, to bemoan the lack of directives. Jean Lacouture has maintained that the general had been ordered to seek a 'politically honourable solution'. President Laniel reiterated in the French assembly on 27 October 1953 the goals set: 1) Develop the forces of the associated states to relieve the French; 2) aim for a "just equilibrium of efforts and sacrifices" by the free nations where their solidarity was demanded (i.e. increased US involvement); 3) achieve the defence and independence of the associated states within the French Union; and d) do everything by negotiation to achieve pacification in Asia.<sup>484</sup> While these points didn't include orders to go into the offensive they didn't offer guidance for the incessant Viet Minh attacks either. In effect, parliament left decisions to those on the ground – a practice with a long tradition in French colonialism.<sup>485</sup>

At the same time Viet Minh General Giap forced Navarre's hand by threatening to once again invade Laos. Underlying Navarre's decision to block an infiltration through a large air-supported base in Dien Bien Phu (inspired by the success of Na San) was a burning desire – widely shared – to 'casser le Viet'<sup>486</sup> and to force them to the negotiation table.<sup>487</sup>

<sup>482</sup> Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, 66-7.

<sup>483</sup> Clayton, *The Wars of French Decolonization*, 2-3.

<sup>484</sup> *Chroniques d'outre-mer*, no. 4, April 1954.

<sup>485</sup> Aldrich, *Greater France*, 32, 37, 41, 51-3, 70-1, 74 and 78.

<sup>486</sup> 'To break the Viet Minh.'

<sup>487</sup> Both paragraphs, except references to *Chroniques d'outre-mer* and Aldrich based on J. Lacouture, 'Le désastre de Dien Bien Phu' in *Les collections de l'histoire*, no. 23, 52.



Numerous authors have described the ensuing battle and its consequences in great detail, most notably Bernard Fall.<sup>488</sup> It therefore makes little sense to repeat the details. What interests us more at this point is the psychological impact of Dien Bien Phu on the French military. Many veterans and writers have claimed that the defenders, despite being routed, redeemed the army's honour lost in 1940.<sup>489</sup> In contrast to (some of) their predecessors, the encircled French, African and Indochinese, as well as Foreign Legionnaires,<sup>490</sup> fought to the last – or at least until they ran out of ammunition. What is more, hundreds still volunteered to be parachuted into the valley at a time when the garrison's fall became ever more likely. Such kamikaze-like attitudes suggest that these soldiers were no longer battling for lofty, political ideas but for their colleagues and the military's honour – or because elite troops could not stomach defeat.<sup>491</sup> In light of such heroism political moves were difficult to accept. General Salan later openly criticised the government for negotiating in Geneva while the battle was still raging.<sup>492</sup> In his and other eyes France had lost a battle but still not the war despite the annihilation of many elite units.<sup>493</sup> This connotes the assumption that France's resources (and American support) were infinite. It also indirectly implied that something about Indochina was worth further sacrifices.

Back home French politicians and voters had had enough.<sup>494</sup> By throwing in the towel the metropolitan government led many soldiers to believe that the battle offered the former a convenient excuse to pull the rug from under their feet. Among them was eventual Lieutenant-Colonel Puga, who worked as staff officer in Paris during the battle of Dien Bien Phu.<sup>495</sup>

Yet as so often during the Indochina War, opinions and impressions fluctuated. What some regarded as political cowardice was deemed realistic and sensible by others. Bigeard, again, claimed in his memoirs: "We agreed with Mendès France. One evidently had to negotiate. It was useless if the whole expeditionary corps ended up behind barbed wire."<sup>496</sup>

While Bigeard was eventually released from such containment, other POWs, intelligence officers, those running counter-resistance operations, including their local auxiliaries or members of the nationalist armies, were less lucky.<sup>497</sup> The fate of POWs merits a closer examination, not least because it has relatively recently come to the forefront. Louis Stien attributed this to the downfall of communism, which has prompted a re-examination of events behind the Iron Curtain and the role of the western left. Based on various analyses and witness accounts, Stien estimated the death toll among European and African POWs languishing in Viet Minh camps at 60% over a

<sup>488</sup> B. B. Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu* (1967).

<sup>489</sup> See, for instance: A. Home, 'Continuing cost of Dien Bien Phu', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 2.7.1967, LHI 15/5/487.

<sup>490</sup> According to the journalist and author Peter Scholl-Latour up to 80% of these were German. See *Die Zeit*, 4.3.2004.

<sup>491</sup> Bigeard, *Ma guerre d'Indochine*. The general admitted that he spent the last days of the battle in a bunker planning strategies. Whether he was thus in the best position to describe actions and attitudes at that point is debatable.

<sup>492</sup> Salan, *Mémoires*, 421.

<sup>493</sup> In a report issued in 1954 the author noted that the fall of Dien Bien Phu in itself would not have lowered morale. The defenders had on the contrary been a "magnificent example" for all. See 'Projet de rapport sur le moral', 1<sup>er</sup> semestre 1954, commandant en chef des forces terrestres navales et ariennes en Indochine, état-major interarmées et des forces terrestres, bureau du la guerre psychologique, SHD, box 10H 349.

<sup>494</sup> Clayton, *The Wars of French Decolonization*, 71.

<sup>495</sup> Interview, 16.11.1998, SHD/DITEEX 3K 43 – IV – (12AV 311).

<sup>496</sup> Bigeard, *Ma guerre d'Indochine*. The author was captured during the battle and spent the last months of the war in a Viet Minh prison camp.

<sup>497</sup> Masson, *Histoire de l'armée française de 1914 à nos jours*, p. 412.

period between six months and one year. This compares with 72% over four months for those captured at Dien Bien Phu (less for Indochinese). Of 6,449 French presumed POWs by autumn 1954 only 2,587 were released the same year. The corresponding and estimated numbers for *autochtones* are 15,759 and a mere 1,435. Stien accused his former enemies of using prisoners as propaganda tools to be indoctrinated and freed whenever it suited the captors. He might have a point. Between 1947 and 1953 only 595 French and 332 Vietnamese were liberated, compared to almost 2,000 Africans considered more receptive to propaganda. As late as 1953 85 civilians (presumably Europeans) were released, among them 34 children. Stien saw the causes for the high mortality rates in prisoner camps in the absence (or withholding) of medication and nutrition, the replacement of captured doctors with inexperienced Viet Minh nurses, lacking hygiene, social isolation, demoralising political indoctrination, the effects of 'death marches' (particularly from Dien Bien Phu) and a general disregard by the Viet Minh for (European) lives.<sup>498</sup> Small wonder that the few survivors have guarded a highly negative image of their enemies, inactive governments and communist sympathisers at home. This is even more understandable if one gazes at images of released POWs. Most were extremely emaciated and many too weak to walk.<sup>499</sup>

If military figures judged chances during the late stages of the war differently, the same can be said of their views of the final outcome. Negative conclusions have prevailed but nuances exist. Most have deemed France's departure from Indochina a defeat, as well as a complete and irreversible rupture. On the other hand, someone like Colonel Charles Lacheroy felt that the rebellion had actually diminished in southern Vietnam (thanks in no small part to his command in the area) and that France had thus won the war there. He divided the latter into a classical conflict in the north and a guerrilla campaign in the south.<sup>500</sup> This statement has to be taken with a pinch of salt. Lacheroy also proudly recalled violating the Geneva Conventions in regard to POWs and would later advocate total war against nationalists.<sup>501</sup>

As regards the Viet Minh, perhaps a majority within the CEFEO came to acknowledge the opposition's ultimate superiority. The eventual General Guy Mery took part in the French delegation to the international mission charged with overseeing the implementation of the Geneva Accords. Although he fully understood that the Viet Minh ignored most of the principles outlined, he was nevertheless impressed by their discipline and organisation. He witnessed how Hanoi completely changed within hours once the new masters had entered. Curiosity led him to speak to his Viet Minh counterpart, who conveyed to him that the French could never have won. Contrary to the latter his men had been fully focused on the war effort and were prepared to fight for many years.<sup>502</sup>

<sup>498</sup> L. Stien, *Les soldats oubliés: de Cao Bang aux camps de rééducation du Viet-Minh* (1993), annexe III.

<sup>499</sup> Numerous haunting images and testimonies have been incorporated in Marcela Feraru's documentary *Face à la mort: les témoignages des prisonniers de Ho Chin Minh* (2008).

<sup>500</sup> A correspondent with *The Times* would have disagreed. He described how in April 1950 Viet Minh forces combined guerilla and classic warfare during an offensive in Cochinchina. Instead of disappearing after the initial attack, they stood and fought the advancing French forces. *The Times*, 5.5.1950.

<sup>501</sup> Interview, 13.5.1997, SHD/DITEEX, 3K 18 – V – (12AV 77). For his subsequent theories see for instance 'Scénario-type de guerre révolutionnaire', *Revue des forces terrestres*, October 1956, no. 6, pp. 25-9.

<sup>502</sup> Interview, 26.11.1996, SHD/DITEEX, 3K 4 – V – (12AV 16).

## Epilogue

The Indochina War officially ended on July 20, 1954 but continued on many levels as no participant had made the desired gains. Ho Chi Minh did not attain Vietnam's unification while Sihanouk and King Sisavang Vong struggled to retain their newly-found independence. The French lost to the US what little military and political influence they had held (and had fought for) until then. Among French survivors the war and all the resulting resentment lingered on, creating a dangerous mix of ideas. Yet again, servicemen of all ranks have come to different conclusions in regard to their roles during the war, the latter's aims, strategies employed, the final outcome and the future. The only thing all have had in common have been physical and psychological scars. Another common denominator lies in the belief that Vietnam in particular fell into darkness after the French (and later the American) departure.<sup>503</sup>

A considerable number quit the army after the war and attempted to lead a civilian life. Among them was Pierre Huteau who took up work in Paris before accepting an offer from the *Compagnie coloniale du Haut et Bas Congo*.<sup>504</sup> Unwilling to further risk their lives for a country which didn't seem to care they reduced their allegiance to the surroundings of their families and (remaining) friends. Some faltered. They did so either because they could not forget the horrors of the war or, as Bodin has pointed out, because France had become unrecognisable and disappointed many.<sup>505</sup> Others were more successful. Former paratrooper Pierre Brice, alias Pierre Louis le Bris, became an actor. Initially playing in a number of French B-movies he shot to stardom in Germany in the role of a native American in the film adaptations of Karl May's novels.<sup>506</sup>

Numerous French servicemen remained in the army, which had become their emotional home. The experience of the Indochina War (often coupled with that of WWII) had strengthened the bonds between them. Many of these soldiers were immediately rushed to Algeria where they experienced a repetition of events in Southeast Asia, not least torture and indiscriminate killings. Whereas the problem had remained sporadic in Indochina, it became institutionalised in Algeria. It famously led the writer Jules Roy and General Jacques Paris de Bollardi re to publish scathing criticisms of the military's practices.<sup>507</sup> The case of de la Bollardi re is perhaps more intriguing because he commanded elite parachute troops in Indochina and became a general at the young age of 48. Despite his illustrious career, doubts about France's colonial engagements entered de Bollardi re's mind during his Southeast Asian tour. He began to feel that the CEFEO had become entangled in an international conflict "without purpose that consumed our army, absorbed the energies indispensable for the reconstruction of France and compromised the role, which we had to take up in a re-forming Europe". What worried him most were the first signs of blind fury in the face of an invisible enemy and the resulting misconduct. De Bollardi re claimed that cases of torture and arbitrary killings among his troops were rare, and that those caught were immediately

<sup>503</sup> See for instance Captain Levavasseur's testimonial in *Historia sp cial*, no. 28, 29. His circumstances were somewhat peculiar as he had been born and grown up in Indochina.

<sup>504</sup> Biography written and sent by his daughter on 10.5.2009.

<sup>505</sup> Bodin, *Les combattants fran ais face   la guerre d'Indochine*, 257.

<sup>506</sup> www.pierrebrice.de.

<sup>507</sup> Roy, *M moires barbares* and de Bollardi re, *Bataille d'Alger*.

sanctioned.<sup>508</sup> Upon his return to France he overheard young officers, released from Viet Minh prisons, accusing the French press, intellectuals and leftist politicians of betrayal. He took notice of dangerous ideas propagating a stronger influence of the army in public life. In Algeria he observed professional troops obsessed with the communist threat, hell-bent on revenge for defeat in Indochina and referring to FLN fighters as 'Viets'.<sup>509</sup> One can question the sincerity of the general, who has claimed to have eventually sensed and understood the willingness of colonial subjects to rule themselves. But unlike others who witnessed the army's brutal methods in Algeria, he refused to get involved and paid for his stance with sixty days in prison. After witnessing the generals' putsch he quit the army in 1962.

The later General Georges Buis, too, felt that alternatives to the Indochinese killings and abuses would have existed. He bitterly regretted the complete rupture of relations following the Geneva conference in 1954. The acrimony in his case was even greater, as he had been born and had grown up in Saigon. Buis believed that the comportment of French soldiers, administrators and civilians had left a highly negative legacy. In his opinion negotiations would have resulted in a situation whereby "...one would have had a proper independence without Dien Bien Phu, without breaking off all relations with this Far East and without acting like swines, which is what we did".<sup>510</sup>

For a considerable portion of veterans such behaviour was the logical consequence of a situation, in which the French Army had to battle an atrocious enemy with its arms tied behind its back. To win it would not only have required more resources but also the freedom to pay like with like. To such men effective propaganda, resettlements, torture and killings represented ugly but necessary means to win struggles against committed and fanatical insurgents while safeguarding French influence. One name in particular has stood for what became known as 'revolutionary warfare': Colonel Roger Trinquier. His experience of guerrilla war in Indochina, Algeria and Katanga led him to write several books. The most famous one, *La guerre moderne*, was published in 1961, probably with the partial aim of helping to prevent another French defeat in Algeria. In it Trinquier outlined his idea of modern war and counter-insurgency as follows:

Sometimes called subversive war or revolutionary war, it essentially differs from past wars in the sense that victory is not achieved uniquely through the clash of two armies on a battlefield. [...] War is now a collection of various actions (political, social, economic, psychological, armed, etc.) which aims at the reversal of the established power in a country and its replacement by another regime. In order to succeed the attacker tries hard to exploit the internal tensions of the attacked country [...] Out of an originally localised conflict they will sooner or later always try to create a generalised conflict. [...] It is crucial to know that in a modern war we not only come up against some armed gangs dispersed over an entire territory but against an armed clandestine organisation whose essential role it is to impose its will on a population. Victory can therefore only be achieved through the complete destruction of this

<sup>508</sup> Alain Ruscio has not entirely agreed arguing that torture "was neither commonplace nor the exception". See Ruscio, 'L'armée a-t-elle torturé?' in *Les collections de l'histoire*, no. 23, 46-7.

<sup>509</sup> De Bollardière, *Bataille d'Alger*, 52-67.

<sup>510</sup> Interview, 13.3.1998, SHD/DITEEX 3K 27 – V – (12AV 219). Buis, a *chef de bataillon*, served in Leclerc's 2<sup>e</sup> DB and HQ.

organisation. [...] Any party which has supported, or which supports our adversaries, will be considered a part of the enemy's party. [...] In modern war, as in otherwise classic war, it is an absolute necessity to employ all arms which our adversaries use [...] The army charged with waging war needs to receive from the nation an unreserved, affectionate and devoted support. Any propaganda that could affect its morale by making it doubt the necessity of sacrifices has to be suppressed mercilessly. [...] <sup>511</sup>

It is not too difficult to discern here the patterns of the French war effort in Algeria, the reasons for its escalation and France's final exit. Evidently, the author ignored many parameters, among them the conflict's metropolitan and international impact, which were instrumental in prompting de Gaulle to disentangle his country from North Africa. In a situation where the enemy was only vaguely defined, where the absolute support of the home country was required and where any means were acceptable, the outcome could only be a major human catastrophe – which it turned out to be. A democratic government and its electorate could not possibly sign up to total war – unless attacked in the way France was by Germany in 1940. Vice versa, a military convinced of Trinquier's ideas would sooner or later clash with the realities of decolonisation, which it did in April 1961.

It is crucial to remember that these ideas were born out of Trinquier's experiences in Indochina. There, he built a counter-resistance composed of highland communities, which he and his staff eventually had to leave at the mercy of the Viet Minh. It is also worth pointing out that the Algiers rebellion was not so much carried out by generals as by colonels like Trinquier – men who had served as junior officers in Indochina. <sup>512</sup> The controversy surrounding these men has deflected attention from many others who would have agreed to some extent with Trinquier and his colleague, Colonel Charles Lacheroy. Most of these however would never have propagated total external and internal war to the bitter end. That said, a major criticism of these survivors has concerned the lack of French intelligence and propaganda. As General Hugo Geoffrey later remarked: "We needed fewer armed units and more political people who understood what it took to keep the sympathy of the population in a similar situation...The Viets exploited our mistakes." <sup>513</sup>

Where such men existed they were at times stopped in their tracks. As a young officer Colonel André Perrin volunteered for the *Services actions* and a tour in Indochina after some training in intelligence gathering. Upon his arrival he realised that, despite General de Lattre's openly expressed emphasis on intelligence and propaganda services, the existing staff was not producing anything of substance. Amazingly, Perrin was rejected by Salan on the basis that he had originally been an artillery officer. Perrin was bluntly told: "Here we need a *Coloniale* and not an artilleryman." As a consequence, a paratrooper filled the vacancy who, like his predecessor, had no experience in the work he was supposed to do. <sup>514</sup>

It appears at times as if those in charge had learned nothing from WWII. Captain Raymond Lagier helped to set up a secret service in Britain during WWII. He admitted that even the more

<sup>511</sup> R. Trinquier, *La guerre moderne* (1961), pp. 15-6, 19 and 47-8.

<sup>512</sup> Masson, *Histoire de l'armée française*, 438-9.

<sup>513</sup> Interview, 14.5.1998, SHD/DITEEX 3K 37 – III – (12AV 249).

<sup>514</sup> Interview, 3.6.1998, SHD/DITEEX 3K 39 – II – (12AV 255).

qualified among his colleagues looked like amateurs in comparison to British MI6 agents. The captain pointed out that while the British had operated all over the empire, French specialists had always focused on Germany. He further stated that the British seemed much more open to new ideas than their French counterparts, who also faced deep suspicion from within the French military establishment.<sup>515</sup>

The authorities were also slow in recognising the need to win hearts and minds. The assumption appears to have been that the benefits of the French Union did not need advertising. If it happened at all, hearts and minds were won by chance and through individual initiatives. A British liaison officer noted for example that French troops had helped with the harvest in South Annam.<sup>516</sup> The military doctor André Thabaut for his part recounted how he treated villagers for all kinds of conditions. He was realistic enough though to appreciate that his actions were a drop in the ocean rather than part of a large-scale effort. In his memoirs he wrote: "On dreams, of course, of the installation of village dispensaries and nurseries as they certainly existed during the colonial époque... But these times are past."<sup>517</sup> Thabaut would probably have been disappointed to learn how scarce such installations had actually been. His statement revealed, however, certain myths of French colonialism.

That said, these examples do not tell the whole truth. Over the years the French army collected a considerable amount of information on its enemy. Some of the details emerged from the (often brutal) interrogation of captured Viet Minh. Others stemmed from documents gathered after attacks. Many of the resulting reports can today be studied at the SHD. Among them are:

- two short studies regarding the communist high command, the structure of units, tactics and equipment between 1949 and 1955;
- a 22-page long index of regular units operating in the northern area (dated October 18, 1950);
- a complex organisational chart detailing these forces (dated September 15, 1951);
- a further study outlining the Viet Minh high command, regular and irregular forces, recruitment, numbers, equipment, training and tactics (from the beginning of 1953);
- a collection of captured documents describing French units, organisation, positions and equipment (dated August 11, 1953);
- a history of various Viet Minh operations (dated January 13, 1954); and finally
- a long study describing the evolution of Viet Minh forces (dated December 1954).<sup>518</sup>

The dates of these reports imply that at least from 1949 on intelligence was forthcoming. Of the above-listed documents it is worth having a closer look at the last one. Its most striking features lie in the specifics and the authors' sense of awe. The study by the French high command outlines how the communist movement grew over the years, partly through American, Japanese

<sup>515</sup> Interview, 27.1.1999, SHD/DITEEX 3K 47 – II – (12AV 334).

<sup>516</sup> 'Weekly Intelligence Report', no. 21, by the Military Liaison Officer Saigon, 14.10.1950, NA, FO 959/49.

<sup>517</sup> A. Thabaut, *Médecin lieutenant au 1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon Muong: Indochine (1954-1955)* (2004), p. 58.

<sup>518</sup> All documents issued by the Commandement des forces terrestres du Nord Vietnam, état-major, 2<sup>e</sup> Bureau, SHD, box 10H 2353.

and ultimately Chinese aid. The authors estimated communist troop strength by December 1946 at about 60,000 regulars and 25,000 para-military elements. These figures are in line with newer estimates quoting 50,000 and 30-50,000 men and women, respectively, by 1947.<sup>519</sup> The text further includes a relatively detailed depiction of the various military and administrative sections, as well as centres of instructions, whose locations were apparently well known. The report also stresses the adaptability, the realism and “objectiveness” of the Viet Minh leadership, which would regularly undergo severe auto-criticism after setbacks. The writers went so far as to describe the commanders of elite units, such as Division 308 or 316, as “brilliant”. They equally acknowledged that these units were composed of mountain tribes. In so doing they (unconsciously) refuted the traditional French claim that the Viet Minh represented a uniquely Annamese (or Vietnamese) movement. Apart from that, the authors understood that their enemy’s qualities owed to political indoctrination which turned individual soldiers into tools for the greater cause. The result was, in their words, fighters ranking “among the best soldiers in the world” demonstrating “endurance”, “aggressiveness”, “robustness” and “spirit of sacrifice”. The report concludes with the warning that the ceasefire in 1954 would not spell the end of the Indochinese saga as Ho’s ultimate goal remained the unification of Vietnam.

The French-Indochinese military and administrative apparatus did not systematically ignore hearts and minds, either. As George Kelly has outlined, a body for psychological warfare existed. It was founded in 1952, named *Direction générale de la guerre psychologique*, and was headed by Nguyen Huu Long. Its aims consisted of improving morale of the national army and of spreading propaganda among the population. Due to the high illiteracy rate in Indochina officers made ample use of whispering campaigns and loudspeakers. One target were Viet Minh prisoners, for whom the bureau established a rehabilitation camp twenty kilometres outside Hanoi.<sup>520</sup> The officially independent Vietnamese government and its French advisors were well aware that such campaigns in themselves did not suffice. They knew that the Viet Minh’s success partly lay in the exploitation of unrest caused by poverty and lack of land. In 1953 the government thus started redistributing abandoned land and set limits to the terrain one person could own and cultivate.

The authorities also turned their attention to resettlement and self-defence schemes. Unfortunately, the first measure was not feasible in Vietnam due to the dense population, lack of land and intensive agriculture. But the authorities improved the protection of villages in Cochinchina. They also initiated relocations in lesser-developed and populated Cambodia. Particularly in the frontier province of Svay-Rieng successful projects were completed as early as 1946. Similarly, the authorities chose several plots around Kompong Cham for the same purpose. After learning about major Viet Minh infiltrations they carved them up, made them habitable and strengthened their defence. The surrounding population was then encouraged to move in, which a large proportion ostensibly did.

<sup>519</sup> The figures reached 125,000 regulars, 75,000 regional and 250,000 irregular forces by the spring of 1953. See M. Windrow & M. Chappell, *Men-at-Arms series: The French Indochina War, 1946-1954* (1998), p. 23.

<sup>520</sup> It is an interesting detail that General de Lattre claimed that of the 8,000 Viet Minh captured during a six-month period, none apparently wanted to rejoin their comrades. He quoted this figure during a press conference on 24 June 1951 in Hanoi. See *Chroniques d'outre-mer*, no. 7, July 1951.

It was a small staff that planned and realised these early projects. By 1952 though the Cambodian government came to recognise the value of the measures. Its interior ministry duly created a Direction for the Self-defence of the Population charged with developing a nationwide plan. At its peak the new programme affected the lives of almost half a million people out of a total of 3,748,000.<sup>521</sup> More importantly, it cost the Viet Minh vital civilian support, forcing it to withdraw to its core areas. As successful as such programmes proved, they remained exceptions to the rule. As Kelly has recalled:

....these responses were largely isolated and empirical, spread out over a vast territory where the conditions of the battle fluctuated. They implemented no single viable strategy of counter-subversive warfare. The political and propaganda measures were equally reactive. At no time during the Indochina War did the French Army really assign a paramount urgency to these tasks or pursue them as an inseparable part of the military program. Still, many could not help but observe that this was precisely one of the foundations for the enemy's persistency and success.<sup>522</sup>

A further conclusion from the war has been the belief that the US let the French down, not only during Dien Bien Phu but throughout the conflict. The fact that the latter provided immense financial and material assistance appears to have been blanked out. In the same way ex-soldiers have resented the seemingly growing American overtures to the governments and military of the three associated states. Among other things later General Jean Le Chatelier oversaw the return of no-longer-needed war material and acted as liaison officer to the steadily growing US Military Assistance Advisory Group for Vietnam (MAAG-V). His accounts of the time echo a latent anti-Americanism, which faded when he visited the US on an official mission. At the time he angrily noticed how his colleagues were gradually pushed out of the training missions to the nationalist armies. He found it difficult to accept that the French generally seemed to "give, tell, return, sign and give up everything and everywhere". As for the Americans, he found them pretentious and clueless regarding the situation in Southeast Asia. To demonstrate his contempt he refused to speak English, pointing out that no hierarchy of languages existed.<sup>523</sup> Such feelings have abounded among veterans who could not help sensing a certain Schadenfreude when the Americans eventually pulled out of Vietnam in most disorderly fashion. But such disdain has at times been mixed with admiration in view of the sheer material, financial and political power the US exerted. It could not but remind someone like General Alberic Vaillant of France's own frailty.<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>521</sup> 1948 census.

<sup>522</sup> Kelly, *Lost Soldiers*, 91-104 (quotation on pp. 92-3).

<sup>523</sup> SHD, box 1KT 442.

<sup>524</sup> Interview, 22.5.1998, SHD/DITEEX, 3K 13 – VII – (12AV 88). General Vaillant served in Indochina as captain/*chef de bataillon*.



## Chapter 5: “Pleasant, clever, businesslike but not really trustworthy” – British soldiers’ thoughts on Malayan land and people

Testimonies of British (ex-)servicemen have customarily centred on equipment, operations, activities during rest and comical mishaps. Elongated statements on Malayan communities, population centres or the environment have been few or brief. Fairly representative references in questionnaires to ethnic groups, for instance, have amounted to the rather monosyllabic “primitive” or “quite friendly”.<sup>525</sup> Most memoirs do not feature more extensive contemplation either. If written by a former officer, they resemble manuals for counter-insurgency campaigns. If the author is a former private or NCO, the book verges on a (military) comedy. Lengthier and more complex depictions have usually, but not exclusively, sprung from well educated (former) servicemen. They tended to command non-European units, operate in the deep jungle (where they came in contact with aborigines) or converted into civilian roles after the end of their military duties.<sup>526</sup>

One can, of course, ask whether this outcome surprises. Soldiers, particularly British ones, have traditionally not regarded it as their job to analyse social, political, economic and environmental issues during their (overseas) postings. But other attitudes have existed elsewhere. It suffices to compare the relatively technical British approach in Malaya with the more curious and reflective French stances on Indochina. (Cynics might argue that it helps to explain the dissimilar outcome of the conflicts.)

Before we go into military reactions to Malaya it is worth exploring the various aspects, which help to explain the relative lack of inquisitiveness and pondering on the part of (former) British soldiers.

### **Military constraints, WWII, education, age and interest**

Testimonies make it clear that the remoteness of military camps, meagre pay, out of bound areas in urban centres and the necessary secrecy severely restricted personal explorations in Malaya. In parallel, jungle training, drills, patrols, ambushes, guard duties, searches, resettlements, repairs, inspections, convoys and often changing postings left little time to ponder, write, photograph or draw. Even if soldiers had been given more time, the wearing climate would have

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<sup>525</sup> Answers taken from forms filled out during the first week of July 2007 by George Gibson (formerly Malayan Engineer Regiment) and a former infantryman preferring to remain anonymous. Questionnaires might not constitute the ideal form of communication but the same respondents would have filled entire pages to describe patrols or skirmishes.

<sup>526</sup> The exception to the exception is Frederick Hudson, a National Serviceman and eventually a corporal. He left the territory after his tour and became involved in the British building sector. His published memoirs – *Loyal to the End: A Personal and Factional Account of National Service in Malaya* (2006) and *National Secret Service: Deception and Conspiracy in Malaya* (2008/9) entail detailed descriptions of the environment. In an e-mail exchange on 15./16.12.2008 he admitted that this owes to his son and daughter-in-law encouraging him to add more depictions of his surroundings.

discouraged strenuous activities – be they physical or intellectual.<sup>527</sup> Soldiers preferred to spend the little rest they were granted showering, relaxing and enjoying a chilled beer. Former National Servicemen and private, Tony Hamilton, remembered the typical routine of infantry units: “We went out [on patrol] for about five days, six maybe. Come back in. Get in [to the base] in the morning. Scrub your kit. And then have a night in bed. And then perhaps in the morning they’d say: ‘Well, briefing.’ And you’d be out again maybe three o’clock in the morning.”<sup>528</sup> Aforementioned George Tullis declared that he never took leave during his entire tour in Malaya.<sup>529</sup> While this does not seem to have bothered him too much, others were less happy with their schedules and tasks. Brigadier Michael Calvert, commander of the resurrected SAS, bitterly complained about the absence of a staff officer, to whom he could have delegated.<sup>530</sup> Even the very energetic General Templer spent so much time touring the territory, meeting with various representatives and reading or writing reports that he confessed to the colonial secretary, Oliver Lyttelton: “When I’ve finished in Malaya, I simply must have some leave. I mean proper leave. So must Peggie [his wife]. Though I say it, we’ve never stopped since we came here and there’s a limit to what one has to give and to the pace at which one can live in this climate...”<sup>531</sup>

Besides pressing duties, the lower ranks did not usually possess the means to survey their surroundings and forcibly ended up at the local Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (NAAFI)<sup>532</sup> instead. Around 1950 yearly pay for both a regular and conscript trooper, gunner, sapper, signaller, private, etc. was roughly £73/year, if he served at home. Initially a regular, single subaltern/2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant earned about £500/year. Pay in differing branches varied with specialists earning more. Official tables of the time list additional pay for “work of an objectionable nature in the tropics” which amounted to 1 shilling and six pence a day. (Whether “objectionable” meant ordinary jungle patrols or more unpleasant work is not spelled out.)<sup>533</sup>

Duties and climate apart, a probing mind would probably have required a childhood and youth during which future soldiers were encouraged to question and to explore. In reality, often interrupted schooling, followed by early employment, eradicated intellectual thirst before it could potentially develop. Several veterans indicated that they took up jobs at an age as early as fourteen if they saw much of their local school at all.<sup>534</sup> As a consequence, soldiers might not necessarily have lacked fascination and keenness but rather the tools to describe what they observed. The not infrequent illiteracy, or at least difficulty with reading and writing, undoubtedly hampered the flow of communication.

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<sup>527</sup> That said, sports played a major part but military tasks imposed limits: As an entry into the August 1954 *Journal of the Royal Hampshire Regiment* states: “The tempo of operations has left comparatively little time for sport...”  
Journal held at the regimental museum in Winchester.

<sup>528</sup> Interview, 19.9.2006. Hamilton also mentioned the preference for staying in camp.

<sup>529</sup> Interview, 25.4.2007.

<sup>530</sup> Interview, October 1987, IWM, 9989. Calvert initially toured Malaya to brief General Harding on the Malayan situation before setting up the 22<sup>nd</sup> SAS.

<sup>531</sup> Cloake, *Templer*, 317.

<sup>532</sup> NAAFI have been providing other ranks with household goods and services during their tours either at home or abroad. See [www.naafi.co.uk](http://www.naafi.co.uk).

<sup>533</sup> ‘Rates of pay, additional pay and allowances’ (various ranks and arms), appendix I and II, army estimates, 1949–50, Parliamentary Papers, 1948–49, XXIV, LSE.

<sup>534</sup> One of many cases is Brian Lloyd. He started working as an office boy at Lloyds at the age of 15. During National Service he served as a telephone operator on the RAF base in Changi and in Kuala Lumpur. See interview, 8.8.2007

Age, too, was undoubtedly an issue. The majority of National Servicemen (and regulars) were in their late teens and early twenties when they entered the services. Often, the higher ranks were not much older, particularly subalterns doing their mandatory and temporary tours. In fact, one struggles to differentiate between officers and other ranks on contemporary photographs, were it not for their pips/stripes and caps.<sup>535</sup> Perhaps then these young men simply did not yet possess the maturity and curiosity (spurred at university for instance) to survey their exotic surroundings on the rare occasions they were offered the time to do so.

On the other hand, one can ask just how much of an interest one could expect mostly youthful soldiers to take in a new environment. It is probably fair to say that this age group generally tends to be less interested in ethnology and more in the company of their peers or the pursuit of the other sex. It is no coincidence that the veteran turned author, Leslie Thomas, titled his quasi-memoirs *The Virgin Soldiers*.<sup>536</sup> Even so, one might have expected men, who had never ventured beyond their village, town or county, to have been excited about the prospect of seeing far-away destinations. In fact, those who voluntarily joined up with the army have often cited the desire to leave behind their old surroundings.<sup>537</sup> Yet it should be remembered that a large percentage of servicemen had not volunteered for military service in a distant land. Most would probably have preferred to enjoy their youth at home.<sup>538</sup> Hence, it is at times difficult to discern much enthusiasm and curiosity in their accounts. Although the military tour in Malaya has profoundly marked veterans, one suspects that the imprint owes mostly to the comradeship and less to the tropical surroundings. Perhaps interest comes with age. A considerable number of veterans have revisited today's Malaysia not only once but often several times. This time around, many have explored the jungle, mountains and beaches insomuch as their fragile bodies have allowed.

### Imperial culture?

Soldiers' scant knowledge of Malaya made it difficult to place the territory and its conflict into a broader political and cultural context. Yet it does not necessarily follow from this insight that the same men were unconscious of British colonies, protectorates and dominions in general. While some aspects of the emergency might have been uniquely Malayan, such as its dependence on rubber, there were plenty of parallels to draw in other cases. Ethnic patchworks, for example, certainly existed elsewhere in the British world. Given these parallels, it is well worth looking into what has been labelled imperial culture in the context of this research. It can contribute to an

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<sup>535</sup> A former senior military figure consulted for this research (who preferred to remain anonymous) recounted his career in terms of age. He was eighteen when he was called up for National Service but soon signed up with the regular army. After nine months he was appointed lance corporal, becoming a full corporal after a further year. Following another four to five months service he was commissioned to Sandhurst and obtained the rank of lieutenant after two years. Four years on, he had reached the rank of major. The interviewee argued that the maximum age for a major was (and still is) thirty-two. He also held that the few successful ones who climb(ed) further up on the ladder reach(ed) the rank of brigadier around the age of forty – which appears rather young. Yet the interviewee pointed out that the current chief of staff of the army was probably in his fifties. Interview held on 6.5. 2007.

<sup>536</sup> The work was first published in 1966 and became a classic.

<sup>537</sup> George Tullis gave such a reason.

<sup>538</sup> Tony Hamilton certainly did. See interview 19.9.2006.

understanding of how far servicemen were 'infused with empire', or not, and whether this has influenced their impressions and memories of Malaya.

Ward has boldly held that "an imperial outlook had been an integral feature of British public life for several generations."<sup>539</sup> MacKenzie has particularly pointed to military-inspired entertainment, which formed an apparently fundamental part of British popular culture during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Given that the majority of Britain's military conflicts between 1815 and 1914 occurred outside Europe that martial amusement was therefore, at least indirectly, imperial.<sup>540</sup> Cathrine Hall has drawn attention to the early imperial historian J. R. Seely, who argued that empire and the nation could not be separated. Britain's interests were strongly connected with the colonies and dominions especially during the interwar years. Hall has also suggested that the sum of experiences by travellers, merchants, soldiers, sailors, farmers, prostitutes, teachers, officials and missionaries point to a highly pervasive nature of imperial culture.<sup>541</sup> Wendy Webster for her part has highlighted the noticeable, imperial outlook of the Victory Parade in June 1946 (at which a contingent of the MPAJA participated). As a counterweight to the often quoted Social Survey in Public Opinion on Colonial Affairs of 1948 Webster has emphasised that 67% of those quizzed had heard of the Groundnut Scheme in Tanganyika. The author has further cited the involvement of Commonwealth forces in the Korean War, which strengthened the bond between English-speaking people. (She could also have pointed her finger at the composition of British-led forces in Malaya.) The sum of this evidence has led her to evoke "a people's empire" and "global Britishness".<sup>542</sup> Webster further developed these ideas in a contribution to Philip Buckner's and Douglas Francis' *Rediscovering the British World*.<sup>543</sup> Quoting radio programmes, documentary and feature films produced by the Ministry of Information and the Colonial Film Unit during WWII she has hinted at the unifying experience of WWII. Finally, Andrew Thompson has highlighted that the income of many Britons directly and indirectly derived from the empire, that the *Daily Mail* and *Express* devoted a considerable part of their content to the latter and that the population increasingly consumed products from the colonies and dominions by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Admitting that empire entered peoples' lives in "subtle and unobtrusive" ways he has concluded that the latter thus represented a "significant factor" but was by no means "all-pervasive".<sup>544</sup>

Instead of quoting various further arguments in an ongoing debate, I shall introduce my own evidence. It mostly confirms Thompson's argument in that one should neither ignore nor overstate the impact of Britain's overseas possessions on servicemen. Imperial facets regularly crop up in interviews and questionnaires (not least because I specifically asked) but less so in memoirs, while almost completely lacking in regimental journals and internet testimonials. Several of the participants in this research noted that they were shown the red-dotted map of the British Empire at school. Some remembered having to memorise names of territories, explorers, conquerors and

<sup>539</sup> Ward, *British Culture and the End of Empire*, 4.

<sup>540</sup> MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism and the Military*, 3 and 12.

<sup>541</sup> Hall, *Cultures of Empire*, 2, 9 and 16.

<sup>542</sup> Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, 55-8, 69 and 82.

<sup>543</sup> The article on pp. 321-339 is titled 'The Empire Answers: Imperial Identity on Radio And Film, 1939-1945'.

<sup>544</sup> Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?*, 40, 44-8 and 241.

products.<sup>545</sup> Yet the same men often conceded that colonies and dominions were seldom discussed in the family or at work – not least because many fathers were serving in WWII. Despite the lack of discourse, several professed feeling pride in the empire in their youth. But only a handful have been of the opinion that the latter mattered in their lives. Furthermore, only two veterans mentioned relatives living in dominions or colonies. Former infantry officer Archibald Elkington had one grandparent in Canada and one serving in the Indian Civil Service.<sup>546</sup> Ex-National Serviceman Terence Healy's great uncles and aunts, too, moved to Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>547</sup> Every now and then interviewees and respondents, among them previously named Tony Rodgers, pointed out that the dominions and colonies had come to Britain's rescue during WWII.<sup>548</sup> But this, like so many other thoughts, could well represent a later insight.

In contrast, many veterans interviewed by Imperial War Museum staff lived and/or served in the empire prior to the Malayan Emergency (and even WWII). Often mentioned postings include the Indian Northwest frontier, Palestine and East Africa. Colonel Humphrey Williams for instance, whose mother was South African, saw service in East Africa prior to the emergency.<sup>549</sup> Former officers William Tee and Michael Jones were both born in India.<sup>550</sup> Lower ranked Harold Atkins grew up in Canada and later saw action in Palestine before being posted to Southeast Asia.<sup>551</sup> And as outlined in chapter two, much of Malaya's high command was steeped in Indian traditions. This insinuates that South Asia rather than Southeast Asia represented the preferred destination for career soldiers.

The question is how lasting and intense that overseas impact was and whether any kind of attachment resulted from it. There, reservations seep in. George Tullis might have been surprised by the number of British he encountered in Malaya during his return trip.<sup>552</sup> Yet within this research sample only Lieutenant-Colonel John Cross is known to have stayed behind, albeit in Nepal.<sup>553</sup> Generally, such deliberations on imperial bearings highlight the importance of age, posting, rank and class. In other words: the Malayan Emergency saw the arrival of seasoned officers and NCOs (subconsciously) influenced by empire but also rather untouched junior ranks. Even so, it seems as if even (former) professional officers have reserved their attachment to the army itself, a particular regiment and its regional origins. Colonel Richard Miers, for instance, devoted the first chapter of his memoirs to his regiment's Welsh embedment rather than to a discussion of its imperial tours. His sigh of relief upon returning from another overseas posting is telling:

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<sup>545</sup> David Wright, previously a regular officer with the Royal Artillery, remembered learning about the empire in history and geography lessons. See questionnaire, 24.7.2007.

<sup>546</sup> Questionnaire, 12.7.2007. Elkington served in Malaya as an RASC officer.

<sup>547</sup> Questionnaire, 5.6.2007

<sup>548</sup> Interview, 21.8.2006

<sup>549</sup> Interview, 15.10.1979, IWM, 6185. Williams commanded a KAR battalion in Malaya.

<sup>550</sup> Interviews, 6.1.1996 and 8.3.2001, IWM, 16397 and 21060. Tee served, among other tasks, as chief instructor at the Jungle Warfare School (Johore). Jones's task was that of a company commander and staff officer with the Gurkha Rifles.

<sup>551</sup> Interview, 2.3.1992, IWM, 12440. He acted as regimental quartermaster sergeant.

<sup>552</sup> Interview, 25.4.2007

<sup>553</sup> [www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/05/colonel-cross-of-the-gurkhas/4810](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/05/colonel-cross-of-the-gurkhas/4810). Cross served in many roles throughout the emergency, among them as company commander with Gurkha Rifles.

... I could enjoy to the full the matchless pleasure of those first few days at home after a long period spent overseas – days when one appreciates as never before the orderliness and cleanliness of our towns and villages; the rich, healthy greenness of our fields in contrast to the faded drabness of those left behind; the fact that [...] everywhere, one can speak English and be understood. It is good to be home...<sup>554</sup>

Apart from such respite, it is rather tricky to spot evidence of anyone consuming all those empire-related radio shows, newsreels, newspaper sections and novels quoted in literature on imperial culture. The most frequent answers by veterans in regard to their interests prior to their military tours involve football, rugby and cricket.<sup>555</sup> Equally, no-one mentioned having eaten lamb from New Zealand or pineapples from Malaya. Most likely, their families lacked the funds to do so. Nor did any veterans consulted profess that their work depended on imperial markets although such reliance could have been very subtle or even unknown to them. All this underscores that imperial influences might well have existed in some cases but that they have proven difficult to assess for witnesses and researchers alike.

Having explored possible reasons for the limited soldierly remembrance of and attachment to Malaya, let us now analyse reactions to specific aspects of that territory.

### **Infrastructure, centres of population, work/living conditions and health**

Reading and listening to military recollections, one could be excused from deducing that the often rather primitive and fragile roads, tracks, buildings, bridges, villages and towns have left little traces in soldierly memories. The same goes for the not always strong health of the territory's inhabitants. Where they cropped up, judgements of Britain's imperial record have often been remarkably benevolent. But noting that "conditions were reasonable"<sup>556</sup> does not necessarily portend obliviousness to the frequently deficient state of sanitation or infrastructure. It might simply reflect other priorities or certain assumptions as to what one could expect. Indeed, the average response offered by veterans in regard to Malaya's infrastructure vary between citing lack of time to pay much attention and referring to Asian (or non-western) norms in the 1950s. Robert Hall, at the time a regular store-man and driver with REME,<sup>557</sup> conceded that he never had much time to dwell on above subjects. David Wright, a regular officer with the Royal Artillery, held that one had to judge infrastructure and living conditions by the (general) standards of the territory. Geoff Parkes for his part, a driver, medic and air dispatcher during his army days, found the sanitation for non-Europeans "very poor" without adding specific reasons for his conclusion.<sup>558</sup>

<sup>554</sup> Miers, *Shoot to Kill*, 19-25 (quote on p. 19).

<sup>555</sup> See for instance questionnaire completed on 9.9.2007 by former Royal Marine, Raymond Hill.

<sup>556</sup> Questionnaire filled out by P. S. Leigh on 26.9.2007. He acted as platoon commander and intelligence officer.

<sup>557</sup> Royal Engineering and Mechanical Engineers.

<sup>558</sup> Questionnaires, July 2007.

A few former soldiers referred to WWII and indirectly to the Japanese occupation (but less to the succeeding BMA or the pre-war administration) when pondering on structural deficiencies in Malaya.<sup>559</sup> These were considerable as a BMA report highlighted. Its authors lamented in particular the shortage of road transport, which hampered efforts to distribute food and help the Malayan economy back on its feet.<sup>560</sup> Yet their complaints to some extent hid their own blunders. In analysing the BMA's legacy Martin Rudner has principally criticised the former's habit of outsourcing crucial supply services to questionable parties and the refusal to pay adequate wages to local labour.<sup>561</sup>

Nevertheless, the official, and it seems widely accepted, version has been that the Japanese occupation had caused all social and economic problems plaguing Malaya after the war.<sup>562</sup> Owing to their initially rapid expansion and the allied counter-attacks the (new) invaders did indeed destroy or dismantle a considerable part of the infrastructure, some of which found its way to the Burma-Thailand railway. The effect of this plundering did not escape British soldiers serving during the Malayan Emergency – even if the realisation had to be forced on them. One RAF unit for example got lost in the jungle for six days due to its reliance on a 1936 ordnance survey map. The latter still featured railway tracks, which had been dismantled by the Japanese, while the jungle had overgrown what little remained.<sup>563</sup>

Yet Japanese interference could not in every case conceal the limited British development of Malaya and the latter's almost purely economic interest. A look at contemporary maps<sup>564</sup> reveals that western Malaya, home to the tin and rubber industry and targeted by the communist guerrillas,<sup>565</sup> possessed a reasonable network of roads, as well as two major railway lines. In contrast, the eastern two-thirds of Malaya were almost completely devoid of such arteries.<sup>566</sup> Since British and Commonwealth troops were deployed in the west to counter the communist threat they can be excused for regarding the area as fairly developed.

Even seemingly solid infrastructure did not always withstand closer scrutiny. Called on by his shocked wife, General Templer at one point inspected a derelict tuberculosis hospital in Kuala Lumpur. The doctor in charge had informed his wife that the only way for the necessary repairs to be undertaken would be an accident by an important person. One strong kick by Templer produced a wide hole in the floor and prompted the arrival of the Public Works Department the next day.<sup>567</sup>

<sup>559</sup> See for instance form filled out by anonymous on 7.7.2007.

<sup>560</sup> 'Report on the British Military Administration of Malaya, September 1945 to March 1946', by H. R. Hone, 1946. Rhodes House/Oxford University, 915.13 s. 6 (1946:1).

<sup>561</sup> M. Rudner, 'The Organisation of the British Military Administration in Malaya, 1945-46', *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, vol. 9, no. 1, March 1968, pp. 95-106. Reprinted and held at Rhodes House/Oxford University, 915.16r 21 (5)

<sup>562</sup> In an official documentary the commentator described how the Japanese had destroyed large parts of the infrastructure and neglected the needs of the population. In addition, they had left behind a legacy of theft and corruption. See: 'Voices of Malaya', IWM, COI 670.

<sup>563</sup> L. Rayner, *Emergency Years: Malaya 1951-1954* (1991), pp. 47-9.

<sup>564</sup> The one consulted in this context is included in General Bower's previously quoted report, NA, WO 106/5990.

<sup>565</sup> This targeting might also have had symbolic reasons. As James Walvin has pointed out, plantations represented "an obvious (and generally malignant) bastion of colonial interests". See J. Walvin, *Fruits of Empire. Exotic Produce and British Taste, 1660-1800* (1997), p. 151.

<sup>566</sup> A British woman engaged in social work in Malaya noticed in 1953 that the main route to the east coast was simply a mud road. See Sheenan, *Out in the Midday Sun*, 332.

<sup>567</sup> Cloake, *Templer*, 281.

But an ordinary serviceman would have had little reason to visit a public hospital in Malaya as the army ran its own facilities.

Where changes were initiated, they did not necessarily result in improvements, either. This held particularly true for the New Villages. Hailed as the solution to the problem of the emergency, sanitation in these communities left much to be desired, agricultural land was often poor and the villages' administrations beset by corruption.<sup>568</sup> While the British communication machinery largely overlooked these problems,<sup>569</sup> Colonel Miers made the following observations when he visited a resettlement near Kluang:

It was a dreary, depressing place surrounded as usual by a thick and rusty barbed-wire fence. [...] Living conditions in the villages and estate lines were still very primitive. In some cases long wooden huts were divided into cubicles and shared by several families, one cubicle for a small family, two for a large [one]. Each cubicle was again divided by the tenants into living and sleeping rooms, with a shelf a couple of feet above the floor on which the whole family slept. Except for electric light there were strictly no modern conveniences; water was carried from a tap outside.<sup>570</sup>

Dennis Leek, a RASC driver in Malaya, wrote: "... the accommodation [...] was bad. I know this because I worked on the resettlement programme." Unsurprisingly, Peter Franklin, a National Serviceman and clerk, concluded that: "People didn't like resettlements."<sup>571</sup> Given his unit, one can assume that he, too, was involved in forced relocations. Yet it appears as if few servicemen, who were in some way concerned with the New Villages, have found these experiences worthy of much contemplation. Earlier quoted Tony Hamilton suspected during a patrol along a village's fences that insurgents had infiltrated to collect food. In the interview he elucidated in great detail the dubious demeanour of a Chinese family he encountered. But he remembered most vividly the mayhem he caused when he fired shots into a shack, which turned out to contain nothing but chicken. The probably rather cramped housing conditions and lack of sanitation appear to have left little impression.<sup>572</sup> Perhaps with reason. In many cases these communities would probably have compared favourably with some of the camps soldiers had to content themselves with. In the May 1954 issue of the *Royal Hampshire Regimental Journal* the authors described D Company's camp near Kota Tinggi as "in a pretty poor condition". Perhaps even this didn't dent soldiers' morale much, as many had witnessed the destruction brought about by German bombardments during WWII.

Some members of the higher military echelons recognised the potential for unrest in Malaya and the sympathy for communism triggered by poor infrastructure. Labourers' accommodations were a particular concern. To deal with such issues Templer set up the Combined Emergency Planning

<sup>568</sup> Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, 176.

<sup>569</sup> One of the villages, Yong Peng, became the subject of a cheerful documentary. Its commentator began the latter by stating that: "Young Peng is certainly a place for happy families." He then went on to describe how the villagers could buy wood from the local saw mill free of interest and grew vegetables on the spot. The village's school was built largely through collected funds and attended by the villagers in the evening. The commentator admitted that not all villages were up to the same standards and that "some might never achieve it." See: 'Proudly Presenting Yong Peng', Malayan Film Unit, 1954, IWM, COI 621.

<sup>570</sup> Miers, *Shoot to Kill*, 36-7.

<sup>571</sup> Questionnaires, July 2007.

<sup>572</sup> Interview, 19.9.2006.



Staff (CEPS). ‘Templer’s spies’, as they were jokingly and angrily referred to, toured the territory to look for and report on trouble spots while also attending State War Executive Committees (SWECS). One of them was Lieutenant-Colonel Napier Crookenden who felt that “... even in the best-run British plantations the labour lines where they [the tappers] lived were disgracefully primitive. No proper running water, no proper latrines – really extremely poor [...] management.”<sup>573</sup> Templer’s insistence on improvements prompted resistance from the United Planter’s Association (UPAN). Nonetheless, positive examples existed. One was an estate run by a Swedish manager, who had set up proper accommodation, including sanitation and even badminton courts for his workforce. The manager suggested to the visiting Major Halliday that such improvements could best quell communist sympathies. Halliday later found out that the man was widely disliked by his British colleagues who, according to the major, were “constantly trying to keep down the level of wages paid to their tappers”.<sup>574</sup>

As with labour and squatter accommodation, one notes a paucity of commentaries on ordinary villages, towns and cities. In the case of Singapore that is somewhat understandable as most servicemen merely passed through this bustling city – unless they were dispatched there again during the Maria Hertogh Riots.<sup>575</sup> Only passing references have been made to places like Ipoh or Taiping, home to the vital tin industries, or Penang, eventually to become the “street-food capital of the world”.<sup>576</sup> Part of the reason for skipping the topic undoubtedly lies in the fact that many areas were out-of-bounds for soldiers.<sup>577</sup>

Among the few commentators has figured former NCO Ron Stevens, who served in Malaya with the RASC.<sup>578</sup> He mentioned that Singapore appeared “to be picking up with trade and businesses after the Japanese occupation”. Stevens also remembered that in 1949 many villages (kampongs) still consisted of shacks with little hygiene facilities.<sup>579</sup> Lengthier observations of Singapore feature in the memoirs of earlier named Oliver Crawford. During a short taxi ride to an officers’ club he monitored the following scenes:

We were driving down long straight streets, crammed with strange traffic, choked with harsh tangled noises, garish with colour – with white walls and dark shutters, with pavements always arcaded under an upper story, vanishing behind pillars, getting lost in shop-fronts and kitchens. Street after street followed, all the same, full of moving figures, wild traffic, and these strange shop-fronts, as artificial-looking and tawdry as theatre-sets. [...] All was confusion – shouting

<sup>573</sup> Interview, 2.1.1996, IWM, 16395. Napier Crookenden acted as chairman of the CEPS in the director of operations’ HQ.

<sup>574</sup> Unpublished and undated memoirs by the former company commander. Record found at the Royal Hampshire regimental museum in Winchester.

<sup>575</sup> During these riots several Europeans were killed, among them British soldiers. The troubles originated in the decision of the local courts to hand back a young Dutch girl to her original parents. The latter had been forced to leave her behind after the Japanese attack. A Malay family had then adopted and raised her according to Muslim traditions. When her parents returned they found that she had been married to a Malay man through arrangement. They demanded her back which her new family refused. The Dutch couple then took the case to court, which ordered the young woman to be kept in a Catholic convent while the case was debated. News of this reached the wider population causing outrage among Malays. It took the police and the army several days to restore calm and order. See Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, 335 and 337.

<sup>576</sup> W. Beinart & L. Hughes, *Environment and Empire: The Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series* (2007), pp. 154 and 163.

<sup>577</sup> George Tullis recalled that large parts of Kuala Lumpur were off-limits for soldiers. See interview, 25.4.2007.

<sup>578</sup> Royal Army Service Corps.

<sup>579</sup> Questionnaire, 6.6.2007.

men, cavernous gutters full of garbage, black-eyed Chinese children, faces watching from upper windows. The streets had so many dimensions – their life continued sideways through open shop-fronts into kitchens with flickering orange fires, into bedrooms and storehouses; it continued out through alleyways where confused groups could be glimpsed between cracked walls and pavements where children and dogs crawled in the litter; it continued upwards, by staircases to second and third floors where wooden shutters were thrown back in the forlorn hope of letting coolness into dark cluttered rooms. From a taxi window one could see only the ceilings of these rooms, hung across with clothes-lines and poles, lanterns and bird-cages and bundles...<sup>580</sup>

Evidently, certain stereotypes of Chinese life – it was mostly them who have inhabited Singapore – surface in this commentary. One can read into it a sense of mysteriousness but also chaos, filthiness, misery and overpopulation.

Such hints are as close as it gets in regard to references to health, unless one presses veterans on the issue. There is an obvious, possible reason for this. Soldiers, usually not equipped with the eyes of experienced doctors, had little reason to suspect that Malay villagers, Chinese miners or Tamil rubber tappers were sick or undernourished – at least not any more than the servicemen themselves. The latter knew only too well what it meant to go hungry or to suffer from malaria, leptospirosis,<sup>581</sup> ringworm and unidentified fevers. Few sources do not feature at least one accident or illness.<sup>582</sup>

On contemporary photographs many British soldiers also appear, if not emaciated, then at least very lean regardless of tasks, units, posting or period.<sup>583</sup> Former National Serviceman Leslie Ives offered an explanation. During a short leave on the island of Penang resting, swimming and dancing with local women were only of secondary priority. To quote the author: “I daresay much of our spending was on food. We were still eternally hungry. Much to the surprise of many a waiter we would eat a substantial meal – and then ask for the same again! In those days I found it hard to put so much as a pound on.”<sup>584</sup> Nobody has directly lamented the scarcity and monotony of military rations but it appears from such testimonies that the effect of war-time restrictions lingered on.

Britain saw the introduction of rationing by the Ministry of Food and the Board of Trade in January 1940. The regulations entailed limitations on food items, clothes, footwear and even furniture, with some exceptions for certain groups. For most of the population, including future soldiers, this meant dull meals, long queuing, low consumption and old clothes. After the war the government even extended the scheme, which did not fully disappear until 1954.<sup>585</sup>

In view of this, servicemen might have found the scenes in Malaya quite familiar. Ex-sapper George Gibson for example or the previously quoted Ron Stevens found the general health and

<sup>580</sup> Crawford, *The Door Marked Malaya*, 16.

<sup>581</sup> Leptospirosis is caused by the accidental absorption of a bacteria that has been shed through animals' urine. It triggers a number of troubles. See [www.tropmedres.ac](http://www.tropmedres.ac).

<sup>582</sup> As always there are exceptions to the rule: Robert Hall, a former REME driver, escaped without ailments. It undoubtedly helped that he didn't have to go on patrols.

<sup>583</sup> See for instance the group pictures of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion the Royal Hampshire Regiment in the regimental journal, February 1955.

<sup>584</sup> Ives, *A Musket for the King*, 103.

<sup>585</sup> I. Zweininger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls and Consumption, 1939-1955* (2000), pp. 9-59 and 69-87.

living conditions decent (despite the latter's earlier comments on villages). The latter added that the children were "well dressed". Others noticed slightly unhealthy looking locals but do not seem to have been overly concerned by it. Instead, several veterans cited the international context. Archibald Elkington commented: "For a developing nation I thought they [health and living conditions] were good."<sup>586</sup> Some former servicemen provided more pessimistic assessments without further elaborations. For David Sleeth for instance, a regular sapper, health and living conditions in the territory were simply "poor". One veteran and ex-infantryman<sup>587</sup> hinted at the impact of WWII when commenting: "Being only five years after the Second World War the non-Europeans looked rather poor in health, especially children".<sup>588</sup> His comments fit the picture painted by members of the Division of Nutrition at the Institute for Medical Research of the Federation of Malaya. In their study<sup>589</sup> the authors concentrated on Malay and Indian smallholders, fishermen and labourers. They found low levels of protein, vitamin, iron and calcium levels, which reached serious deficiencies among children. Infection with intestinal helminths<sup>590</sup> was widespread. What struck the authors most was that Malayan children "looked dejected and lifeless" while often showing "cracked lips, angular stomatitis<sup>591</sup> and tongue changes". The authors admitted that, besides economic problems, eating traditions, especially the over-use of rice, played their part.

### Climate, vegetation and wildlife

Malaya's exotic environment, too, has inspired few eulogies among (former) servicemen, let alone imperial references. Among these could have figured visits to zoos or botanic gardens (i.e. Kew Gardens) or paintings and literature. Most recollections have unwittingly echoed Somerset Maugham's depiction of a green hell swallowing inexperienced intruders, and of a climate slowly draining men's energies.<sup>592</sup> Where veterans have made any allusions they have not gone to classic writers but to Spencer Chapman. The latter spent part of WWII in the jungle with the MPAJA and later turned his experiences into a book.<sup>593</sup>

The ambiguous memories are understandable. Jungle patrols in Malaya were gruelling affairs, especially for newly arrived recruits. Oliver Crawford depicted such a back-breaking march:

<sup>586</sup> Questionnaires, June and July, 2007.

<sup>587</sup> He wished to remain anonymous.

<sup>588</sup> Questionnaires, 5 and 12.7.2007.

<sup>589</sup> R. C. Burgess and Laidin Bin Alang Musa, 'Report on the state of health, the diet and the economic conditions of groups of people in the lower income levels in Malaya', 1950, Rhodes House/Oxford University, 915.12 r. 58 (3).

<sup>590</sup> A parasitic worm. See [www.medterms.com](http://www.medterms.com).

<sup>591</sup> Inflammation, often accompanied by infection at the edges of the mouth. See [www.gpnotebook.co.uk](http://www.gpnotebook.co.uk).

<sup>592</sup> An experienced Malayan police officer tells the narrator in one short story of the *Far Eastern Tales*: "You haven't lived out East all your life. It ages one before one's time. One's an elderly man at fifty and at fifty-five one's good for nothing but the scrap-heap." (p. 9) In another section a scientist's wife gets lost in the jungle and is never found again after being left behind by the young assistant she had fallen in love with. (pp. 234-9).

<sup>593</sup> F. S. Chapman, *The Jungle is Neutral* (1949).

Our feet slipped in the mud, straining and squelching. My chest heaved like a bellows, and I gasped through lips salty with trickling sweat. One hand held my carbine – with the other I hauled at roots, wiped the sweat from my eyes in a shower of drops, pressed deep in the mud as I staggered. Soon I was desperate. [...] I knew only that my world had contracted to a hillside of reddish clay, tangled with roots like rhododendrons, deluged with water that dripped off every leaf and soaked my clothes and ran down my sweating filthy body in rivulets, a hillside up which I now had to struggle, up and up and up.<sup>594</sup>

Returning after several days Crawford concluded that he hated 'jungle bashing'. So did many other veterans.<sup>595</sup> But a minority blossomed in the unusual surroundings. They liked the outdoors and maybe a degree of solitude. They managed to keep fitter than the rest and possessed a stoical character. Peter Maule-Ffinch claimed to have been one of them, recounting: "The jungle to me was a very pleasant place, really. Provided you were aware that you couldn't force yourself through the occasionally very dense underground, you could move along reasonably well", he commented. Like others, he pointed out that the jungle's interior was less compact than its fringes. One only had to get used to the fact that large trees filtered out most of the daylight.<sup>596</sup> Yet the darkness, a myriad of ghastly animal and insect sounds, as well as the constant fear of ambushes caused occasional breakdowns among troops.<sup>597</sup>

The British high command soon saw the need to better prepare soldiers for jungle patrols. Midway through the emergency a Jungle Warfare School was set up in Johore Baru, at the southern tip of Malaya. There, experienced personnel, often Australian, introduced newly arrived recruits into the jungle's secrets. The training brought home the stark contrast to Britain's environment. As former private Ryan recounted: "... it was an eye opener because we done our training originally in Friday Woods. I mean, there was no heat in Friday woods in May, June. [...] Suddenly we get a sweaty monsoon, rain and everything thrown at you."<sup>598</sup>

The Malayan climate indeed produced daily and at times bucketing rain, which swept away entire army camps. Intense heat and moisture contributed to conditions whereby servicemen rarely wore dry clothes. Trousers and shirts seldom lasted for more than one jungle tour while skin problems abounded. Despite these difficulties most servicemen got used to the situation, as had earlier explorers, businessmen, administrators and missionaries.

Judging from sources, the sapping heat had probably the greatest impact. One IWM documentary shows engineers engaged in repair work for a helicopter. Most striking are the slow movements and the fact that the men wear only shoes and shorts. Given the many requests for the few available helicopters the slowness cannot have been due to idleness but must have been imposed by the extreme climate.<sup>599</sup>

<sup>594</sup> Crawford, *The Door Marked Malaya*, 37.

<sup>595</sup> Frederick Hudson's wish to opt out of office work to go into the jungle was met with bewilderment by his superiors. The latter were bombarded by requests to exempt soldiers from such incursions. See *Loyal to the End*, 75.

<sup>596</sup> Interview, 16.2.1988, IWM, 10120.

<sup>597</sup> Previously cited Tony Hamilton remembered: "... it was nerve-racking. Some blokes broke down and cried. Couldn't cope with it. Just went berserk. Ran off." Interview, 19.9.2006.

<sup>598</sup> Interview, 5.5.1998, IWM, 18006.

<sup>599</sup> Untitled film sponsored by the admiralty, January 1956, IWM, AMD 1570.

Adaption knew its limits as problems befell soldiers quickly and easily. But all these ills have been recorded without much ado. Formerly conscripted telephone operator Brian Lloyd casually remarked that he must have contracted Malaria somewhere but figured that it could also have been on a later trip to Southeast Asia.<sup>600</sup> The flippant attitude towards such problems raises questions about the perception of good or bad health. What soldiers regarded as a minor physical difficulty back then might today lead to immediate repatriation. In this context it is worth mentioning that practically no veteran has claimed to have suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. This doesn't mean that it didn't exist but rather that it was not recognised. As former private White put it: "...back then, it was, 'get a grip, pull yourself together!'"<sup>601</sup>

In line with other environmental aspects, veterans' recollections have not covered rubber plantations in great detail. One could put this down to the fact that even by the 1960s rubber only covered about six percent of the landscape or fifteen percent of the cultivable land respectively. But Malaya became Britain's most profitable tropical possession from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mostly because of rubber. These led to over one million hectares being under cultivation by 1922. Astonishingly, production doubled from 409,000 tonnes in 1946 to 915,000 tonnes in 1966.<sup>602</sup> Army units spent considerable time patrolling these areas. Even so, hardly any veterans have reminisced about the long rows of trees or tappers' delicate but monotonous work, so artfully depicted in Wargnier's *Indochine*.

Veterans have commented slightly more on animals and insects. Accounts of them had little to do with the colourful and friendly creatures depicted in Kipling's *Jungle Book* of 1894, which some might have read during their childhood. Perhaps the lean and mean tiger Shere Khan found its way into soldiers imagination during patrols. Real encounters were extremely rare but not unheard of. Former member of the New Zealand Regiment, Frank Burdett, was attacked by a formidable beast while asleep in a jungle camp. Only the presence of his colleagues prompted the animal to give up its badly injured prey.<sup>603</sup>

The much more frequent snakes appear often in documents and interviews but usually without extensive contemplations on form, colours and habits. The norm for references are short, chilling but also often comical.<sup>604</sup> The frequent anecdotes could give the impression that the reptiles crawled everywhere when in fact they avoided contact. But the few pythons sighted caused men to abandon their bath in a river or lake, even though no actual attacks have been reported. Only the king cobra demonstrated such aggression. One representative crossed a jungle camp causing havoc among soldiers.<sup>605</sup>

Elephants, too, have occasionally surfaced in sources, even though no-one actually ran into them. The real menace stemmed from insects. Mosquitoes turned many ambushes into nightmares while ants could force platoons to abandon their patrol. Hornets for their part caused

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<sup>600</sup> Interview, 8.8.2007.

<sup>601</sup> [www.britains-smallwars.com/malaya/windo.htm](http://www.britains-smallwars.com/malaya/windo.htm). White did his National Service presumably as a private.

<sup>602</sup> Beinart & Hughes, *Environment and Empire* (OHBECS), 239 and 246.

<sup>603</sup> [www.britains-smallwars.com/malaya/Frank/index.html](http://www.britains-smallwars.com/malaya/Frank/index.html).

<sup>604</sup> One exception to the rule is the rather talkative Philip Longbon who spent much of the interview conducted with him describing a huge snake. See interview by C. Allen for BBC Radio 4, 1983, IWM, 8451. Longbon served in Malaya in an infantry regiment.

<sup>605</sup> Major Halliday's memoirs.

potentially more physical damage than a guerrilla attack. Major Gibb evoked a swarm's assault on a camp in an unusually vivid description. It left one soldier unconscious and several others out of action for days.<sup>606</sup>

### Local communities

It is perhaps a measure of the limitations imposed on (peaceful) human interactions that the complexity of Malayan society has not been reflected in military memory. Only Malays, Chinese, Indians, Europeans and Eurasians have found their way into reminiscences. (Dayak trackers could technically be included but they were recruited in Borneo specifically for the emergency.) However, places along the west coast, such as Penang Island, boasted many other groups, such as Siamese, Burmese, Arabs and even Africans.<sup>607</sup>

Philosophical reflections even on the main, five groups have not been particularly plentiful despite opportunities for closer examination. Indian *char-* and *dhobi-wallahs*<sup>608</sup> belonged to most camps for example. Tamils constituted a considerable part of the working force on estates,<sup>609</sup> which in turn were managed by Europeans. Malay drivers became increasingly numerous within the RASC and its successor, REME.<sup>610</sup> Chinese staffed shops, cinemas or restaurants while dominating in the New Villages. Many Eurasians for their part worked in the military and civilian administration. Furthermore, British company and platoon selections competed in various sports games against each other or against local teams.<sup>611</sup>

Accounts of such games give a measure of the relative effortlessness with which soldiers of various backgrounds and locals mingled on such occasions. One match worth quoting stems from Major Arthur Campbell, who described it as follows:

In the afternoon we went across the football ground to watch a game which had been organised against the local police. The opposition consisted of a mixture of Malays and Indians. [...] The Dyaks and Sakai<sup>612</sup> came streaming out of their bashas to join the fun. They made futile efforts to kick the ball [...] They spent most of the time flat on their backs but they, and the Sakai womenfolk who were lining the edge of the ground, thought the whole performance a huge joke. Needless to say, the soldiers thought so too, and gave them every encouragement. The game soon got under way with Tilley refereeing. He had to exert his iron

<sup>606</sup> *A Walk in the Forest*, unpublished memoirs, 1945-1950, IWM (documents), 1884 (box 86/3/1).

<sup>607</sup> J. Nagata, *Malaysian Mosaic: Perspectives from a Poly-Ethnic Society* (1979), p. 21 (table originally taken from J. Low, *The British Settlement of Penang* (1836/1972), pp. 125-6.

<sup>608</sup> *Char-wallahs* were usually food and drink vendors while *dhobi-wallahs* engaged in laundry and tailoring services. Both had traditional connections with the British Army. See: [www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/58/94427958.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/58/94427958.shtml).

<sup>609</sup> The majority of plantation workers were recruited among Tamil-speaking Hindus from South-India. See Beinart & Hughes, *Environment and Empire* (OHBECS), 242.

<sup>610</sup> In 1951 REME became the branch responsible for practically all of the army's equipments and engineering manpower, thereby absorbing technical units from other branches. See: [www.rememuseum.org.uk/remeeass/history.htm](http://www.rememuseum.org.uk/remeeass/history.htm).

<sup>611</sup> See for instance: Major H. G. Parkin (ed.) *The Rifle Brigade Chronicle* for 1957, regimental Museum, Winchester.

<sup>612</sup> Early, derogatory term for aborigines.

discipline more and more as the game wore on. In the end the police won. The score was 2-nil, though one of the goals was hotly disputed in four different languages.<sup>613</sup>

It is telling that three groups were absent in this encounter: British expatriates, Eurasians and Chinese. The ensuing analysis of relations between army personnel and these groups will offer some explanations.

The relaxed atmosphere described in the testimony above is a fairly evocative account of the few interactions recalled, except in cases when insurgents, their supporters and resettled squatters were involved. One can question such a rosy picture but there is simply not much evidence of open hatred and clashes between servicemen on the one hand and Malays, Indians or aborigines on the other. Only former National Serviceman, Roland Howes, felt, without further elaborating, that: "The population didn't seem to like the Brits."<sup>614</sup>

Generally, one gains the impression that British soldiers didn't particularly take to or resent representatives of the various local communities (with the exception of the Chinese). They conversely put them in the context of their tours, tasks and the conflict in general.<sup>615</sup> Servicemen judged not so much features and habits but attitudes and actions towards them and the belligerents. They appreciated the often delicious meals prepared and the efficient cleaning and ironing services provided by locals. But if Malay policemen failed to effectively support army units or if Indians demanded exorbitant interest rates, their communities on the whole could appear in a negative light. That said, it is difficult to ascertain what soldiers effectively witnessed themselves and what they gathered from colleagues. Either way, conclusions could be rather crude. Earlier quoted Tony Rodgers ironically but matter-of-factly stated: "The Chinese used to own everything. The Tamil population would be the workers and the Malays would sleep all day."<sup>616</sup> While such labels sound racist in today's world, Rodgers did not seem to have guarded any hostile sentiments in regard to the three communities, particularly not the last two.

Even among the more tolerant and thoughtful observers one cannot help sensing a certain detachment. Relationships, in some cases upheld after the emergency through correspondence, appear to have been based mainly on mutual respect and shared experiences. What is somehow missing are strong and affectionate friendships embracing life beyond the military and the emergency. (Perhaps such intimate relationships have remained rare among veterans themselves.) These are admittedly the thoughts of a younger and foreign observer. But another non-British witness came to similar conclusions at the time. Earlier cited Robert Dibon observed the following scene during his stopover in Singapore:

Young Chinese women dressed in tight silk dresses [...] split up to the thighs, are walking by, indifferent to their success with some French, whose eyes widen with coveted astonishment

<sup>613</sup> Campbell, *Jungle Green*, 66-7.

<sup>614</sup> Questionnaire, June-July 2007 (undated). In the subsequent phone conversation Howes could not elaborate on this point.

<sup>615</sup> Again, there have been exceptions: One respondent, who preferred not to be named, cited the fascinating encounters with other ethnicities as a reason to later study social anthropology. He served in Malaya as an instructor with the Royal Army Educational Corps.

<sup>616</sup> Interview, 21.8.2006.

and admiration. They are not for sale but for conquest and we do not have the time to show to them that the French are otherwise less cold than the English who cleave through this crowd with the greatest indifference.<sup>617</sup>

One could object that the nature of Dibon's and his colleagues' interest was not so much sociological but rather sexual. Even so and as we will see, other French soldiers eagerly reached out to local communities in Indochina, even if their methods were not always appreciated by the population.

In contrast, Peter Maule-Ffinch's categorisations of the multi-ethnic labour force employed on the plantation, where he worked as an assistant manager after his military tour, are rather business-like:

Different races have different characteristics. They're useful for different things [...] If you want sheer, hard work [...] force to bear then you weren't gonna [get] a harder worker than a Tamil. If you want intelligent work done [...] but not done too quickly you'd use a Malay because he's a happy sort of guy, fairly intelligent. And they do things gently, stoically and got a light touch. If you got a job that doesn't require too much care and attention but people actually do it on a task basis [...] you get to a Chinese. [...] The amount of problems you had depended on your labour force's racial mix to that degree. [speaking of strikes] Tamils like that sort of thing. [...] It's racial. I'm not knocking on it. They're great guys but we all have different characteristics [...] The Chinese can't be bothered unless there's a penny in it. [...] He'd rather go out and work. He's more of an individual where's the Tamil is a guy for the mass. And the Malays can't be bothered about anything anyway [...] in broad brush terms.<sup>618</sup>

The statement exposes several typical aspects, which can often be found in the few, more multifarious recollections. To begin with, the author was relatively well spoken. He assumed a civilian task after the end of his military tour, which brought him into closer contact with locals. He judged based on his experiences at work and did not simply reproduce what he had gathered from others. Most importantly, above judgements were determined by the perceived contributions each of the ethnic group could make towards increasing production. Consequently, Maule-Ffinch refrained from protracted philosophical debates. He also appears to have ignored exceptions to the rule, as well as the possible roots of his workers' behaviour. These might have had more to do with the prevailing, precarious conditions on the estates than with ethnic characteristics. What managers or soldiers regarded as troublesome might in reality have been a justified attempt to bargain for better conditions. What they deemed lazy might in truth have been a physical adjustment to a trying climate or even a result of physical illnesses.

Although Edward Said mostly referred to western perceptions of Islam and Arabs, his arguments regarding representations can be applied to British military opinions of Malays – not least because the latter have been overwhelmingly Muslim. Said held that:

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<sup>617</sup> SHD, box 1K 330.  
<sup>618</sup> Interview, 16.2.1988 IWM, 10120.



... the real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they *are* representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer. If the latter alternative is the correct one [...], then we must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is *eo ipso* implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the 'truth', which is itself a representation.<sup>619</sup>

Evidently, Maule-Ffinch borrowed from adjectives anchored in British traditions and classified ethnicities based on British standards.

That said, serving alongside Malays, Indians, Gurkhas, Africans or Fijians during WWII and the emergency often diminished potential feelings of superiority and difference vis-à-vis non-Europeans.<sup>620</sup> Racism may not have been absent among British troops – particularly in relations to Chinese – but interactions could potentially have been more strained. Still, formerly conscripted subaltern John Veys found that many ordinary soldiers and NCOs displayed a worrying degree of bigotry towards non-Europeans. He suspected that such racialism owed to general misgivings of having to serve so far away from home.<sup>621</sup> Major Campbell quoted a soldier commenting on the troubled communal situation in Malaya and possible strategies as stating: "I'll admit it it's not our country but all these niggers who live here look to us to see that the place is decently run. You may say that we got ourselves into it – well, so we have, but now we're in it we've got to send those Chinks back to where they came from."<sup>622</sup>

But let us now have a closer look at the labels attached to the various groups. They are grouped based on their comparative size with the Malays being the largest.<sup>623</sup>

#### a) Malays<sup>624</sup>

To understand the often rather fleeting comments on this group it needs to be recalled that the British administration and military focused their efforts not primarily on the most numerous ethnic group in Malaya but on the Chinese. The latter made up the bulk of the rebel movement and their support base, the Min Yuen. The fact that the average Malay often lived in small and remote villages, so called *kampongs*, near the coast and along rivers further reduced the chance of

<sup>619</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 272.

<sup>620</sup> Many senior officers, who had commanded non-European troops in WWII and after, were full of praise for their men. See for instance interview with Adrian Evill, formerly a KAR officer, on July 1.7.1987, IWM, 9854. Questionnaire, 1.6.2007 and subsequent phone conversation a few days later.

<sup>621</sup> Campbell, *Jungle Green*, 93 (as quoted in V. Purcell's, *Malaya: Communist or Free?* (1954), p. 241).

<sup>622</sup> In 1952 the Colonial Office and the Central Office of Information published and distributed a booklet titled "Malaya – The Facts Behind the Fighting". In it the authors estimated the figures for Malays, Chinese and Indians (South Asians) as follows: 2,631,000, 2,044,000 and 586,000. See Rhodes House/Oxford University, 915.17 r.18 (6).

<sup>623</sup> The definition itself is rather ambiguous. Immigrants and their offspring from Indonesia (and other nearby islands) have often defined their origins depending on circumstances and official criteria (as have to some extent Indian Muslims or Arabs). If economic and political preferences required being Malay, as they increasingly have after independence, they have identified themselves as such while privately insisting on being Indonesian. See Nagata, *Malaysian Mosaic*, 43-9.

bumping into him or her. Moreover, Malays did not constitute the main part of the labour force on rubber plantations or tin mines.<sup>625</sup> In fact, it had precisely been their seeming reluctance to work there, which had led to the influx of Chinese and Indian labour. Yet Nagata has offered an alternative view, namely that the British actively consigned the Malays to administration and agriculture, leaving other branches open to immigrants.<sup>626</sup> A by-product of this development was a changing demographic landscape in Malaya over the decades, which explains the mostly hostile reaction by Malays to the Chinese-dominated insurgency.

The average serviceman encountered representatives of the main ethnic group in the form of usually junior policemen, drivers and mechanics at military bases. There the latter appears to have left an ambiguous impression. The definitions used for Malays vary between the more positive “always smiling and laughing” to the blunter “lazy”.<sup>627</sup> It appears as if (ex-)soldiers (have) regarded this ethnic body as neither terribly helpful nor overly threatening.<sup>628</sup>

The more complex opinions on Malays have, again, sprung from somewhat untypical people. They were either in charge of Malay units, switched to the police or mingled with the highest military ranks. Of the sources consulted five testimonies offer relatively multifaceted insights. The first stems from Brigadier Michael ‘Mad Mike’ Calvert who had decidedly mixed feelings towards the Malays, particularly the sultans:

The Malay sultans were a varied lot, some very good, others were absolute, shall we say, charlatans or knaves. They behaved as if Malaya belonged to them. And this goes back to the Federated and Unfederated Malay States when we took it over. But what wasn't known by an awful lot of people was that [...] most of the Malay sultans were descendents from a conquering race from the Celebes islands now called Sulawesi. And they had conquered Malaya rather like the Normans conquered Britain and had imposed their rule on the native Malays. So they themselves were, just about 150 to 200 years ago, [...] a ruling race. Many of their antecedents hadn't been in Malaya as long as many of the Chinese who traded and settled in Malaya from up to 500 to 600 years beforehand. Throughout all the history of Malaya is this rivalry between the very hard-working, clever Chinese and the Malays who were much more lethargic [...] The Malays were charming people, nice people, like the Burmese. [But] They hadn't got the work ethic at all. They didn't see the point of making profit...<sup>629</sup>

While the above statement represents a rare ethno-historic excursion, it remains slightly crude and not entirely correct. Migration to, from and within Malaya has been complex. The oldest known group, the Negritos/Semang, were pushed into the deep jungle by later arrivals. These originated from southern China and northern Vietnam (from 2000 B.C. on) but also from Malaya itself and Borneo. All newer arrivals were of Malayo/Polynesian/Mongoloid stock. From the first

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<sup>625</sup> Beinart & Hughes, *Environment and Empire* (OHBECS), 242. Beinart has indicated that Malays only engaged in forest cleaning on a seasonal level.

<sup>626</sup> Nagata, *Malaysian Mosaic*, 10.

<sup>627</sup> Questionnaires, 17.8.2007 and 1.6.2007.

<sup>628</sup> In view of the efforts by the Malay Regiment against the Japanese, armed Malay bands clashing with the MPAJA after WWII, at times violent opposition to the Malayan Union, Malay nationalism and Malay members of the MRLA that is not necessarily obvious. See Bayly & Harper, *Forgotten Wars*, 43-8, 134-6 and 209-17 as well as Ward, Miraflor and Ching Peng, *My Side of History*, 263-6.

<sup>629</sup> Interview, October 1987, IWM, 9989.

century A.D. Indian traders appeared, establishing strong religious and political traditions without settling in great numbers. They were followed by Arabs. Although sending ambassadors and increasingly traders, the Chinese exerted little influence in the first millennium A.D.. The Ming dynasty curbed a later wave. The following centuries also saw partial Khmer and full Thai incursions. Apart from Portuguese, Dutch and British colonisation, migration also occurred from Borneo, Sumatra, Java, Sulawesi and other Indonesian islands up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Large numbers of Chinese and Indians did not enter the territory until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, following the introduction of mines and plantations.<sup>630</sup>

Calvert's statements would offer another opportunity to refer to Said. But the insight is obvious. The brigadier gave his verdict based on his social background, education and profession. He struggled to understand a community less focused on profit but perhaps more on family values and maintaining a subsistence economy. Until the arrival of the British and beyond, Malays habitually engaged in mixed farming and fishing while also collecting forest produce, holding livestock, manufacturing household items, clothes and, if time permitted, jewellery of often great beauty.<sup>631</sup> One could therefore maintain that they had successfully adapted to a wearisome climate and vegetation. At the same time they had retained a charm and hospitality which, given the series of foreign invasions and widespread piracy, should not have been taken for granted.

Former quartermaster turned Lieutenant-Colonel Adams was more tolerant. He described Malay habits and customs as follows: "The Malays won't leave their kampongs. They're parochial people. And even today, the whole of Malaya is covered in compounds. And in the same way that medieval Britain was run on the parish, so Malaya is run on the kampong. [...] And [the Malay] he's not going to stick in the jungle with Chinese."<sup>632</sup> Adams ignored that the Malays did indeed "stick in the jungle", not only in police patrols but also within units of the Malay Regiment.

In the same way that he was critical of the sultans, Calvert had his reservations about that regiment. He believed to know the hidden reasons for the apparent lethargy of Malay soldiers:

We used to call them the Hookworm Regiment. They were lethargic and lack[ed] [of] interest in doing anything. Looking back I'm probably being a bit unfair on them because they had only been sort of reformed after the war and their officers possibly weren't the best officers from the British Army. There may have been some people who just wanted to have a nice pleasant rest but they weren't good. Later they did become good but only to a certain extent after they'd been de-wormed.<sup>633</sup>

Whether the perceived sluggishness owed to infection by hookworm is difficult to verify but cannot be entirely excluded in view of the earlier-mentioned health report. The lack of enthusiasm could also have had to do with other issues. The bulk of Malays regarded the communist uprising in Malaya as a problem caused by British labour and immigration policies. Was it therefore not the task of the European masters to handle unrest caused by these groups? And who could

<sup>630</sup> C. M. Turnbull, *A Short History of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei* (1980), pp. 4-17.

<sup>631</sup> Beinart & Hughes, *Environment and Empire* (OHBECS), 242.

<sup>632</sup> Interview, 16.2.1987, IWM, 9707.

<sup>633</sup> Interview, October 1987, IWM, 9989.

guarantee that the British would win the emergency after they had collapsed under the Japanese onslaught? Calvert also left out any references to the abandoned Malayan Union experiment, which had done little to win over the Malayan majority.

Questioning the Malay effort is not entirely fair for further reasons. First, Malay troops had put up considerably more resistance to the Japanese than many British units during WWII. They had suffered accordingly at the hands of the new masters.<sup>634</sup> Captain Arthur Banks, who fittingly served in the Malay Regiment in the early 1950s, corroborated these facts in an interview when he underlined that Malays “had fought very gallantly at Singapore”.<sup>635</sup> Second, Malays constituted the bulk of the territory’s police, which bore the brunt of communist attacks. Third, there is evidence that Malay patrols performed well in the jungle during the emergency even if their British officers did not always constitute the *crème de la crème*.<sup>636</sup> Again, it is Lieutenant-Colonel John Adams who emphasised this when he remarked:

... They fought well. The kampong Malay, once he got into the Malay police and became part of the military organisation – trained by the British. [...] The top police officers were all British. And some of the lower ranking ones as well – you had Malaya police lieutenants who were British, ex-British army sergeant majors and sergeants. But the chaps who did the actual jungle fighting, the ordinary Malay – they weren’t given the credit they deserve.”<sup>637</sup>

John Chynoweth would probably have agreed. As a young National Service officer he commanded a platoon of the Malayan Regiment. True, the kind of daily contact he had with Malays was likely to create a special bond and result in favourable impressions. Yet this was not a foregone conclusion. As it was, Chynoweth kept largely fond, if not particularly philosophical, memories of his Malay soldiers. One of them, the later General Tun Ibrahim bin Ismail, later chief of the Malaysian armed forces staff, wrote the foreword to his book.

In the course of many patrols the young officer came to admire the sturdy kampong-houses and fondly recalled the luscious meals he and his men were offered when they entered *kampongs*. At the same time marriage and divorce traditions, puzzled him.<sup>638</sup> Apart from that, Chynoweth was greatly impressed by his men’s stamina. Stressing their contribution and that of their comrades, he made a point of stating that a quarter of all infantry battalions operating in Malaya between 1948 and 1953 belonged to the Malay Regiment. He conceded though that he could not find any figures on their killing and capturing rates. He also admitted that he had to restrain his men when Chinese villagers had evidently provided supplies for communist rebels or security

<sup>634</sup> Bayly & Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, 137 and 144.

<sup>635</sup> However, the same man added that those he recruited during the emergency tended to be not “terribly effective in the jungle”. On the other hand, he found many Malays keen on government jobs, salaries, pensions, uniforms and prestige. See Interview, 14.5.1996, IWM, 16654.

<sup>636</sup> In a lengthy correspondence recruiting staff complained that not enough British officers volunteered for the Malaya Regiment because pay was not sufficiently higher than in the British Army. As a consequence, many postings remained compulsory. But the officers already seconded to the Regiment were not of the desired age and lacked fitness. See ‘Conditions of service of British Army personnel seconded to regular forces of the Federation of Malaya’, Colonial Office to the army, January 1952 to February 1953, NA, CO 968/385.

<sup>637</sup> Interview, IWM, 9707.

<sup>638</sup> One of Chynoweth’s men told him that he had bought his wife for 98 Malay dollars. To divorce any wife a husband only needed to utter “I divorce thee.” three times.

forces suffered casualties. Such stories serve as a reminder that communal relations bore the potential for serious troubles and do so to this day.<sup>639</sup> Vice versa, the author found proof in rebel camps that Malays, too, took part in the insurgency against the colonial administration.<sup>640</sup>

Such references are as close as it gets in regard to (communal) politics, of which British army personnel largely stayed out. One who could not, was General Templer. In view of failed constitutional experiments and ethnic tensions, it speaks for him that he persuaded the sultans to open up the administrative services to non-Malays in November 1953. In so doing he demonstrated more skills than the Colonial Office in 1946. In some ways Templer did even better than some Malayan nationalists. Relations between Tunku Abdul Rahman and some sultans at times soured. This owed to the fact that the former posed a growing threat to the latter, who in turn enjoyed the sympathy and support of the wider Malay population.<sup>641</sup>

Soldierly opinions could also vary depending on which section of Malays they were dealing with. German-born George Saunders dismissively stated that: "The Malays are like the Austrians. If they should do something today, they do it tomorrow. If something should be eaten tomorrow, they eat it today." The same man became an advisor to the Sultan of Pahang after his military tour ended. The work-relationship they established functioned smoothly, which Saunders attributed to the sultan's forcefulness and steadiness. The former ended up liking his employer and terminated his Malayan spell with the conclusion that: "We Europeans make the mistake that if things aren't done our way it doesn't work. It's nonsense."<sup>642</sup>

## b) Chinese

When we speak about the Chinese in this context the allusion applies not to insurgents but to squatters, villagers, city-dwellers, businessmen as well as mine and plantation workers. The distinction is admittedly an artificial one because individuals could slip into differing roles. These transformations partly explain why the second-largest community in Malaya often remained an enigma for British servicemen and why suspicion and uneasiness have overshadowed veterans' memories. They may also be the reason why elaborate reminiscences are hard to come by and why those that exist, remain somewhat trapped on the surface. It is particularly striking, if understandable, that (ex-)soldiers (have frequently) lumped together a multi-layered community.<sup>643</sup>

While (former) British soldiers might in many cases (have) condemned the unclear stand of the average Chinese, it should be borne in mind that the latter's position was precarious during the emergency. In effect the community was squeezed between two enemies who both

<sup>639</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from\\_our\\_own\\_correspondent/8524353.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/8524353.stm).

<sup>640</sup> Chynoweth, *Hunting Terrorists in the Jungle*, 29, 58, 61, 64, 80 and 84.

<sup>641</sup> S. C. Smith, *British Relations with the Malay Rulers: From Decentralization to Malayan Independence, 1930-1957* (1995), pp. 112 and 182-3.

<sup>642</sup> Interview, 4.1.1994, IWM, 13660.

<sup>643</sup> In comparison, the secretary for Chinese affairs in the Federation of Malaya guessed that the community could be divided into four groups: 1) "alien born" and "Malayan inclined", 2) "Malayan born" and "alien minded" (i.e. attached to China), 3) "Malayan born Malaysians" and 4) "wind blown". See letter by R. P. Bingham to the Defence Secretary, 16.6.1951, NA, CO 1022/148.

demanded its loyalty and cooperation. Consequently, many opted for accommodating both factions. But leanings shifted over time. In the first years of the emergency most Chinese kept their distance to the police, army and administration while lending eyes, ears and provisions to the insurgents. Once the tide shifted, this flow of information and goods began to go the other way.

British reactions turned out accordingly. Afore-cited Major Campbell wrote about his encounter with a Chinese: "I did not trust the man. To begin with, he was a Chinaman. They were all two-faced beggars, sitting on the fence, waiting to see who was going to get the upper-hand."<sup>644</sup> John Veys was more diplomatic when he characterised the Chinese as "pleasant, clever, businesslike but not really trustworthy".<sup>645</sup> The lack of trust did not just stem from the potential support of insurgents. The fact that some of the latter readily surrendered, offered essential information and even guided patrols back to their former camps and colleagues puzzled British soldiers, police officers and Special Branch staff. They concluded that the Chinese would do anything in exchange for financial rewards – a judgement lingering on to this day. As a consequence servicemen remained suspicious of Surrendered Enemy Personnel (SEP). Former conscript William Harper remembered that: "The mistrust towards him [SEP] [...] was pretty total. I think it was an accepted fact that [...] if we bumped into trouble the first bullet from us would have been in their [his] direction."<sup>646</sup>

Despite such misgivings, servicemen were instructed by their superiors to win hearts and minds – including and most importantly Chinese ones. Soldiers thus smiled, waved and distributed candies to children when passing by villages.<sup>647</sup> Still, such attempts could hardly ever bridge the gap between a hitherto distant administration and a largely self-sufficient community that had been badly let down during WWII.<sup>648</sup> Equally, the British return after the war could never really diminish the heightened if not wholly justified prestige of the MPAJA. Crucial questions were on Chinese minds: would Britain withstand the communist advance in (Southeast) Asia?<sup>649</sup> If so, would it defend Chinese interests against the Malay majority?

Few ordinary British soldiers were aware of such considerations when they landed in Singapore. But gradually some learned about the recent history and the problems besetting Malaya. The result was an occasional understanding of the pressures bearing on the Chinese community and, consequently, its reluctance to take side with the colonial master. Yet not many soldiers actively attempted to get a better understanding of the Chinese either out of distrust, indifference or because none encouraged them to do so. A few took notice of the bustling communities where someone always seemed to be awake.<sup>650</sup> They grudgingly recognised that many Chinese stood out through their intelligence and hard work. Still and significantly, none of the veterans has hinted at Sino-British friendships.

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<sup>644</sup> Campbell, *Jungle Green*, 33, as quoted in Purcell, *Malaya: Communist or Free?*, 129.

<sup>645</sup> Questionnaire, 1.6.2007.

<sup>646</sup> Interview, 4.1.1997, IWM, 17224.

<sup>647</sup> Ives, *A Musket for the King*, 120.

<sup>648</sup> Pye, *Guerilla Communism in Malaya*, 201.

<sup>649</sup> The leanings of Malayan Chinese after the Maoist takeover in China greatly occupied British minds. See 'Extract from 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Malaya Borneo Defence Council, Chinese reactions in time of war', 28.4.1952, NA, CO 1022/148.

<sup>650</sup> Interview with T. Hamilton, 19.9.2006.

It became fairly obvious during military tours that Chinese and Malays did not easily mix either and visibly lacked confidence in each other. As a consequence, the authorities saw their efforts to create a united territory hampered time and again. Not only did the Chinese hesitate to join the Federation Regiment and the police but they also tended to support their own political associations – if they threw in their lot with anyone at all. As Alexander Birks, a platoon commander in the RASC, remarked: “The Chinese didn’t join the Army and the police, generally. They were content to make money.”<sup>651</sup>

This situation worried General Templer in particular because he knew that cooperation would only happen if the Malays felt secure and the Chinese were offered a stake in the new country. (The Indians did not seem to be much on any official mind.) The general and high-commissioner was well aware that the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), initially under Dato Onn, and the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) under Tan Cheng Lock relied on almost exclusive support from the respective communities. Templer was partly to blame for this development. Like Malcom MacDonald he believed for too long that Dato Onn might succeed in bridging ethnic gaps while underestimating the shrewdness of the latter’s successor, Tunku Abdul Rahman. The general also alienated Tan Cheng Lock by banning Chinese-run welfare lotteries. Templer objected to the use of the resulting funds for political purposes, even though a considerable part of the money flowed into the maintenance and improvement of the New Villages. The MCA reacted to the closures by ending all welfare work.

Tan Cheng Lock’s growing disaffection was fostered in part by his British advisors, Victor Purcell and Francis Carnell. The former liked to regard himself as the ultimate expert on the community.<sup>652</sup> He warned Tan Cheng Lock that Chinese interests would take a backseat in an independent Malaya. Templer was furious about this interference and told the two advisors so in no uncertain terms.<sup>653</sup> Even so, it is somewhat symbolic that a traditionally apolitical but otherwise able British soldier failed to judge the ability of local politicians or fell out with them. Perhaps Templer himself had sensed his own weakness. Upon accepting dual responsibility for Malaya he had insisted on a time limit for his tasks.

The general’s difficulties with emerging politicians, communal leaders and sultans is practically the only military allusion to (peaceful) nationalist politics in Malaya. Apart from Templer, the only exception to the rule was an officer quoted by Margaret Sheenan. However, the latter spoke about fears among Singapore’s business elite of Lee Kuan Yew’s socialist People’s Action Party (PAP), which came to dominate the island’s independent government.<sup>654</sup>

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<sup>651</sup> Questionnaire, 17.8.2006.

<sup>652</sup> Apart from lending his expertise to various newspapers, Purcell published about a dozen books on Malaya and on its Chinese community, among them *The Chinese in Malaya* (1948).

<sup>653</sup> Sections on Templer, the UMNO and MCA taken from Cloake, *Templer*, 247, 301, 309 and 313.

<sup>654</sup> Sheenan, *Out in the Midday Sun*, 341.

## c) South Asians

British servicemen encountered South Asians in the form of railway and postal staff (originating from Ceylon and Malabar), merchants (in most cases from Gujarat and Bengal),<sup>655</sup> policemen (mostly Sikhs), *char-* and *dhobi-wallahs* as well as Tamil plantation workers. The rather technical aspect of these interactions influenced impressions in that few significant recollections of this group have survived, other than some minor anecdotes. George Tullis for instance noted that the tall and burly Sikh policemen tended to side with servicemen whenever brawls with locals broke out.<sup>656</sup> Leslie Ives for his part recalled in rather technical fashion the benefits of having a *char-wallah* in camp:

These gentlemen were always Indians and they produced tea (served in glasses) and tasty snacks like egg and chips, egg sandwiches (called banjos) and the like. They allowed you to build up a tab [...] Operating with very little in the way of cooking equipment they [...] were undoubtedly an asset to the camp as a morale booster.<sup>657</sup>

Similarly, Major Richard Neve, then a young infantry lieutenant, was amazed to find that a Mr. Mohamed Ibrahim produced a tailored uniform and mess clothes within a mere three days.<sup>658</sup>

Besides these more trivial episodes, one can detect a handful of more profound observations, even if they were not necessarily intended as such. Above Ives also remembered a stern-looking civilian Pashtun (Pathan) sharing the firing range with soldiers of his battalion. The veteran learned that the former had once helped to defend a British convoy ambushed by guerrillas. This had earned him the right to practice his shooting skills.<sup>659</sup> By his actions the man indirectly justified traditional British preferences in the recruitment for the Indian Army under the Raj.<sup>660</sup>

Relations with Tamils, if they can be called that, tended to be gloomier. Some of those who spotted them took pity on the desperately poor (and mostly illiterate) tappers and forest workers. Previously quoted Alexander Birks reminisced how he and his comrades gave their food rations to destitute-looking Southeast Asian inhabitants of a remote village, most likely Tamils.<sup>661</sup> Given that soldiers themselves did not enjoy a life in culinary luxury, such gestures speak volumes.

Among the testimonies features one less sympathetic reference to wealthier South Asians. Peter Franklin, at the time a National Serviceman and trooper, commented that: "Some of the high-caste Indians were arrogant...." But he conceded that: "... there is bad and good in all races."<sup>662</sup>

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<sup>655</sup> Nagata, *Malaysian Mosaic*, 17-8.

<sup>656</sup> Interview, 25.4.2007.

<sup>657</sup> Ives, *A Musket for the King*, 83.

<sup>658</sup> *Journal of the Queen's Own Buffs Regimental Association*, autumn 2004 and spring 2005, regimental museum, Maidstone.

<sup>659</sup> Ives, *A Musket for the King*, 83-4.

<sup>660</sup> After the Indian mutiny the British Army focused recruitment on 'dependable' ethnicities, such as Sikhs, Gurkhas and frontier tribes of the northwest. See D. Judd, *The Lion and the Tiger: The Rise and Fall of the British Raj, 1600-1947* (2004), p. 89.

<sup>661</sup> Questionnaire, 17.8.2007.

<sup>662</sup> Questionnaire, mid July 2007.



The relative scarceness of comments on South Asians does not necessarily mean that the latter entirely hid behind the scenes. Following the examples from their homeland many educated individuals became active in union matters. The most important one was perhaps Dr. P. P. Narayanan, general secretary of the Malayan Plantation Workers Union, president of the Trades Union Council and member of the legislative council. Narayanan advised Templer shortly after the latter's arrival to visit the most problematic areas in terms of rebel activity. Incidentally, the district also featured some of the worst labour conditions. Templer followed the advice and swiftly pressured the estate managers into improving conditions. At the same time he promised Narayanan to better protect the workers. The union leader in turn persuaded the Tamils to give up a strike and pledge their support for the economic well-being of the territory.

Templer also pushed for a Tamil Home Guard. Many managers regarded this plan as unfeasible due to the apparent un-soldierly nature of the ethnic group – again unconsciously echoing preferences under the Raj. They were proven wrong to some extent by one of their own. A Selangor planter and former naval officer enthusiastically raised and trained a small force, which was duly inspected by a satisfied Templer.<sup>663</sup>

#### d) The expatriate community

Relations between servicemen and the (British) expatriate community entail the most intriguing insights into inter-communal relations in Malaya. Although these rarely went beyond brief encounters on plantations or in bars and cafes, the resulting impressions turned out to be rather accentuated, if not necessarily lengthy. But before we analyse the various views it is necessary to define the expatriate community in the context of this research. In fact, the lines between what constituted long-standing inhabitants (and members of the colonial society) on the one hand and recent (military) arrivals on the other could be rather blurred. A planter or a district officer with a temporary contract did not necessarily spend more time in Malaya than a soldier – certainly not if the latter was a regular. George Booker for instance signed a contract with Dunlop Plantations Ltd. for four years to become a junior assistant in Malaya.<sup>664</sup> On the other hand and as we have seen, many servicemen joined the Malayan police or took up jobs with British businesses once they had terminated their military tour. Vice versa, many planters served in voluntary forces or had joined regiments before WWII.<sup>665</sup> Those arriving after 1945 were also likely to have served in the military elsewhere.

That said, the majority of servicemen spent anything from barely half a year to approximately three years in Malaya depending on the nature of their service and the length of their contract. To simplify things we therefore ignore the exceptions to the rule and consider soldiers newer and

<sup>663</sup> Cloake, *Templer, Tiger of Malaya*, 250 and 265-6. The author has not spelled out whether Tamils actually joined the insurgents or simply sympathised with and supplied them.

<sup>664</sup> Interview, 5.11.1985, IWM, 9127.

<sup>665</sup> Robert Perkins, who initially also worked for Dunlop, did both. See interview with C. Allen for BBC Radio 4, 1983, IWM, 8462.

temporary arrivals. We thus separate them from tin and plantation managers, as well as from other businessmen, administrators and members of the police, plus their families.

Military reactions to this group largely depended on individual ranks and, with that, class. Both senior and junior officers approached planters and civil servants with relative ease and vice versa. It was not uncommon for them to be invited to social events organised by local planters. In return, the former returned the favour by hosting (non-Asian) civilians in their messes.<sup>666</sup> Not so corporals, privates and some members of the high command. In the case of the former the seemingly haughty attitude and behaviour of managers and administrators appear to have reminded of the class-ridden society at home. Men from humble backgrounds might have grudgingly accepted the situation in Britain out of habit. But patrols in the jungle and camp life offered them a glimpse of an egalitarian society. In the forest not only badges (and pips) disappeared (so as not to offer insurgents a welcome target) but also social norms.<sup>667</sup> From a soldier's point of view everyone sat in the same boat and needed to work together.<sup>668</sup> But once units entered plantations and came into contact with managers, the old divisions opened up again. In light of the harsh conditions and the economic reasoning behind the fighting, the lower cadres greatly resented being treated differently than officers. Harold Kirk, formerly a gunner, put it relatively politely when he expressed that: "They [planters] tended to be a bit above other people."<sup>669</sup> Former National Serviceman and later corporal, Derek Blake, put it more bluntly when he recounted:

The relationship [with planters] wasn't a good one at all. We held them in quite low regard. [...] I can recall one occasion when we'd been on quite a lengthy patrol in the jungle. And we came out [...] We'd run out of food and stuff like this. [...] And we walked through the rubber estate and we went to the estate house. [...] There were, I guess, about twenty, thirty of us. And at the time we had a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant. There was a platoon commander. And I was acting platoon sergeant. We went to the estate house and the manager, who was English, British, European, he invited us in. [...] He got out a gin bottle [...] and he started to pour us some drinks. And the platoon commander said: 'Well, just a minute. What about the lads?' or whatever. And the rest of the platoon were sitting with their legs in a monsoon drain. And he sent down jugs of water for them. And we refused to drink. [...] I've got rather mixed feelings, I suppose, because there were a lot of rubber planters and Europeans who were living in very, very difficult and dangerous circumstances. But I don't think they had a very high regard for us, other than at times they could call upon us to protect them...<sup>670</sup>

<sup>666</sup> See for instance references in Major Parkin, *The Rifle Brigade Chronicle* for 1957.

<sup>667</sup> The equality in outlook had its comical side: Frederick Hudson recounted how, during a cordon and search operation around a New Village, he loudly told off a staff sergeant, who had intended to replace Hudson's men with his own. The latter, not able to judge Hudson's inferior rank (corporal), moved his men after some reflection. See Hudson, *Loyal to the End*, 403-4.

<sup>668</sup> Despite all the talk of comradeship throughout the ranks I did not see veteran soldiers and officers of the Suffolk Regiment mingle on Minden Day (August 1, 2006). The latter serves as a commemoration of the Battle of Minden (1759) where an isolated Suffolk Regiment withstood several attacks by French cavalry. It is annually celebrated at the Gibraltar Barracks in Bury St. Edmunds. See: [www.suffolkregiment.org/Minden\\_Day.html](http://www.suffolkregiment.org/Minden_Day.html).

<sup>669</sup> Questionnaire, 2.6.2007.

<sup>670</sup> Interview, 11.8.1985, IWM, 8943.

By citing the gin Blake alluded to the widely held image of planters as heavy drinkers. In fact, former manager Robert Perkins himself admitted that “as a rule we had rather more whiskey than it was advised at first to have”.<sup>671</sup> Other recollections suggest that hard drinking abounded among expatriates regardless of their profession. Earlier-cited Major Richard Neve was shocked by the fact that civilians he met up with at the popular Tanglin Club already ordered brandy in the morning.<sup>672</sup>

On the other hand, planters often gained the impression that particularly National Servicemen did not care about the territory, failed to understand its social complexity and simply longed for a return to ‘Blighty’. Or as George Booker put it:

We used to meet them [the soldiers] in the towns. And if you were sort of sitting in a restaurant or a café having a cup of coffee or a beer [...] you could get into conversation with them. And the impression I got was that they didn’t care for it a great deal. They didn’t like the country. And of course, when they first arrived they couldn’t tell a Chinaman from a Malay from an Indian. They were all foreigners as it were.<sup>673</sup>

Veteran turned author Leslie Thomas partly agreed describing the young National Servicemen as “idle, homesick, afraid, uninterested, hot, sweating, bored, oversexed and undersatisfied”.<sup>674</sup> One could counter that not all servicemen had spent their tour in the safety (and seeming boredom) of Singapore – as he had.

Opinions may change over time, recollections tend to filter out negative aspects and caution rules in the presence of outsiders. Yet Booker’s and Thomas’ statements contrast with comments from former soldiers of whom few have made disparaging remarks about Malaya as a whole. Above quotes highlight though that neither side made much of an effort to get to know the other one and explain their respective situation.

Tensions between the high command and the local European community had more to do with early failures in the counter-insurgency campaign, civilian demands for improved protection and wrangling over control. Long standing members of the Malayan Civil Service, police officers, businessmen and managers<sup>675</sup> resented the increasing dominance of the military, which culminated in Templer’s appointment. Yet previously many had been angered by the seemingly aloof and unconcerned attitude of the Colonial Office in the face of growing troubles. Ironically, the assassination of the most fervent opponent of military leadership in the campaign, Sir Henry Gurney, prompted the selection of a general as high-commissioner and commander-in-chief. Before his death Gurney regularly annoyed servicemen by pointedly distancing himself from any military entourage. On the day of his death he apparently ordered his chauffeur to overtake the armoured cars and trucks preceding him. Colonel and former hussar John Bell remembered his

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<sup>671</sup> Interview, 1983, IWM, 8462.

<sup>672</sup> *Journal of the Queen’s Own Buffs Regimental Association*, December 2003.

<sup>673</sup> Interview, 5.11.1985, IWM (sound), 9127.

<sup>674</sup> Thomas, *The Virgin Soldiers*, 13.

<sup>675</sup> Missionaries are never mentioned in any of the sources.

then group sergeant commenting on the ensuing ambush: "Well, I'm afraid the way he died served the bastard right."<sup>676</sup>

Templer and some of his staff for their part took offence with some of the inherently racist traditions in Malaya. (The parallels to General Erskine's collision with Kenyan settlers are difficult to ignore.) Upon the general's arrival at King's House, his official residence, he was informed that the British did not shake the hands of Asian servants. In reply the general grumbled that: "They do from this moment on." He then proceeded to greet every member of the house staff. Later during his reign he threatened to close a club in Kuala Lumpur when he found out that membership was restricted to Europeans, even though the state's sultan acted as patron of the society. Its committee immediately resigned and gave way to a multiracial one. Plantation managers, too, could not escape Templer's wrath. If necessary, the latter would write to directors of rubber companies to report on perceived deficiencies on their plantations. These examples reflect a general drive to make the expatriate community realise that they had to do their bit in the fight against communists.<sup>677</sup>

The business community grudgingly complied in some measure, not least because they appreciated the improved security under Templer. Up to that time European demands for greater protection had been rejected time and again with the argument that security forces could be used in more efficient ways, i.e. in flexible and offensive roles. (In effect, the result appears to have been a bad compromise as army commanders complained in the early years that their units were used in too many static roles.) Often, estate and mine managers were in actual fact forced to take things into their own hands. A few opted for payments to the insurgents in order to live in relative peace.

Finances generally played an important role in Malaya. Under Templer's reign a force of special constables was expanded and a home guard raised. Both branches were largely composed of Malays who usually guarded plantations. This costly extension was made possible by high commodity prices between 1950 and 1952, which in turn were spurred by the Korean War. However, once the latter came to an end the financial situation deteriorated, forcing a reduction of security forces and triggering renewed complaints from the business community. The relationship between the latter and the administration during the emergency years led Nicholas White to conclude that: "... it cannot be said that the colonial business elite was ever fully satisfied with the government's counter-insurgency policies and activities. The attitude was that more could and should have been done."<sup>678</sup>

As for the Malayan Civil Service (MCS), Templer did not hesitate from firing those who resisted him or failed to comply. In an ideal world the general would have dismissed most advisors to the Malayan sultans. Yet he knew that a mass sacking would hurt his efforts. Pragmatism also ruled his relations with MacDonald whom he considered too much of a talker and not enough of an enabler. Both avoided stepping on each other's toes. Templer was less careful in his dealings with the press whose representatives he mostly detested. The general felt that they should put Malaya's future over short-term sensationalism, which journalists seldom agreed with. If he opined

<sup>676</sup> Interview, 16.9.1991, IWM, 12219.

<sup>677</sup> Cloake, *Templer*, 210 and 264-5.

<sup>678</sup> Both paragraphs based on White, *Business, Government and the End of Empire*, 110-6 (quote p. 112).

that one of them had presented administrative or military actions in a negative light he summoned and scolded the culprit.<sup>679</sup>

For the sake of simplicity I place the police into the expatriate camp. But this requires some specification. First and as previously explained, most junior members of the police were not European but Malay and Indian. Second, the British elements within the Malayan Police consisted of several groups that had arrived in the territory at different times. The highest ranks were the old Malayan hands. A second group was composed of officers, formerly stationed in India, who had been transferred to Malaya in 1947. A third faction – roughly 500 men strong and led by controversial Commissioner Nicol Gray – arrived from Palestine after 1948. Further, various officers were sent from Britain, among them Gray's successor, Arthur Young, to model the force along metropolitan lines. Finally, many European estate and tin managers in Malaya served as part-time special constables. One cannot really count the officers coming from Britain, India and Palestine as part of the traditional colonial society in Malaya. In fact, the growing influence and rough interrogation methods of ex-Palestine officers caused great resentment among the old Malayan ranks.

Ordinary police officers were responsible for traffic, law and order. They also helped to impose curfews, restrict shop opening times and car circulation while also trying to intercept the movement of insurgents. The police also contributed to mixed units and set up a frontier force to guard the border. Further, it established up to 200 jungle squads (eventually called Police Field Forces), which assumed similar roles as army patrols. These long-range squads linked up with aborigines to cut vital supply and intelligence links communists maintained with the latter. Moreover, there was the immensely important Special Branch whose staff focused on gathering intelligence. They were mostly British and in part Chinese.<sup>680</sup>

The blurring line between classic police and paramilitary duties contributed to the sometimes fraught relationship with the military. Soldierly attitudes towards the police oscillated between admiration, tolerance and denigration. Some doubted the loyalty and resilience of ordinary Malay policemen, pointing out that most weapons captured from insurgents had been taken from the police.<sup>681</sup> On the other end of the spectrum stood British (intelligence) officers who closely cooperated with district police officers and Special Branch – a collaboration, which often resulted in spectacular successes. Major Campbell described the partnership with his counterpart from the police as follows:

Jock was the district police officer. We worked very closely with the police. In theory, we were supposed to work to their orders, being legally 'in aid of the civil power', but so close was the co-operation between us that we had reached a stage where we were working hand-in-hand [...] The police could not take on the fighting against the bandits in the jungle, whereas we could not undertake the normal process of maintaining law and order in the villages and towns

<sup>679</sup> Cloake, *Templer*, 267 and 292-4.

<sup>680</sup> Both paragraphs based on: Sinclair, *At the End of the Line*, 166-73. For insider views of the police see B. Stewart, *Smashing Terrorism in the Malayan Emergency: The Vital Contribution of the Police* (2004).

<sup>681</sup> Former National Serviceman and private William Hewlett declared that Malay policemen were hated because of this supply. See interview conducted by C. Allen, 1983, IWM, 8433.

and protected areas. There were, of course, many differences of opinion between us [...] The police, who had no military training, were always full of good advice for the local military commanders. Sometimes, instead of offering advice, they took precipitous action. The soldiers, on the other hand, very often failed to understand the orderly way in which the police set about dealing with a situation which appeared to them to require really drastic action. I had many arguments with Jock. As a result we were beginning to see each other's viewpoint more clearly. [...] Their [police officers'] main value to the Army was the provision of intelligence, for in that country, only those with local knowledge of the people could get information.<sup>682</sup>

The statement entails characteristic traits in that it completely leaves out any personal details. Given the purely technical analysis, we can only guess what the author thought of his counterpart's character.

The varying soldierly reactions to the expatriate community in general should perhaps be seen in the context of events in Britain at the time. While elements within the British administration, police and business circles evoked memories of old imperial days, Britain itself was rapidly changing after WWII – so much so that many returning soldiers struggled to adjust.<sup>683</sup> Labour owed its post-war election victory largely to working and middle class voters, many of whom had fought in WWII. Due to the experienced dangers, sacrifices and comradeship on all levels, many of those demobilised in 1945 returned with a burning desire to change Britain's stifling, social structure. In part encouraged by this mood, the new government introduced national insurance, national assistance, the NHS, the Butler Education Act and housing programmes. All were intended to address hitherto wide-spread poverty, low educational levels, poor housing and restricted access to health services. As a result the working and middle classes acquired unheard of prosperity and political influence in the 1940s, while the upper classes saw some of their advantages and influence fade. Despite the radical changes though much remained the same. Economic realities soon put a break on initiatives and focus shifted to clearing the foreign balance and to global policing duties.

Although figures and definitions have to be read with caution, some are worth considering. The 1974-9 Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth for instance estimated that in 1954 the top ten percent of the population over twenty-five still owned seventy-nine percent of the total national wealth. The earlier Rowntree Study for its part found that 4.6 percent of working class households in an average city like York were deemed to live in poverty. (These figures were later considerably scaled upwards because the authors' definition of poverty was regarded as too conservative.) Other aspects of life in Britain, too, still looked fairly bleak. In 1951 for example, over half of households lacked either piped water, a cooking stove, a flushing lavatory or a fixed bath. Working class children were still more likely to die in their early years

<sup>682</sup>  
<sup>683</sup>

Campbell, *Jungle Green*, 25.

Tony Rodgers lamented that Hemel Hempstead, where he had grown up, had changed from a sleepy country town into an overpopulated, suburban centre upon his return. Crime, previously unheard of, had become an issue. See interview, 21.8.2006.

than those of the upper classes. Those who survived tended to be shorter than the latter. These problems were even more accentuated in rural areas.<sup>684</sup>

It is possible then that military reactions to the Malayan expatriate community echoed the after-war hopes, disappointment and anger of the British lower and middle classes. A seemingly arrogant attitude of a planter, his complaints about insufficient protection, the restrictive membership rules of local clubs (welcoming only officers) probably evoked the inequalities experienced at home. Equally, a tall, well-spoken and confident manager, perhaps married to an attractive woman, symbolised better health, education and higher income. Such scenes raised questions as to the aims and beneficiaries of the British effort in Malaya, of which, as we have seen, at least some servicemen were very much aware of.

#### e) Eurasians

It is remarkable that veterans have hardly alluded to the ethnic group one might expect them to have been reasonably close to. Precise figures are difficult to find. Nagata has cited a 1931 census in which 'others' (i.e. non-Malays and -Chinese or southern Indians and thus mainly Europeans and Eurasians) accounted for 2.1 per cent of the population.<sup>685</sup> In view of such vague definitions one cannot help suspecting that this, most likely small group, represented something of a taboo in Malaya and the British Empire in general. It certainly had done earlier. In his *Far Eastern Tales* Somerset Maughan described two British representatives who hold relationships with Asian women resulting in children of mixed-race. One manager of a rubber estate openly lives with a 'native' women and their two children and reaps condemnation from his colleagues. A district officer only admits to his newly arrived wife that he fathered children with a Malay woman when she presses him. Upon learning the truth his wife leaves him in disgust.<sup>686</sup>

Ronald Hyam has maintained that such inter-ethnic liaisons decreased following the distribution of the Crewe Circular in 1909. In part this was due to civil servants simply marrying their mistresses. This occurred despite the fact that the memorandum was not sent to British representatives in the Federated Malay States (and Sarawak) because these territories were not directly administered by the Crown. One has to conclude from Hyam's text that civil servants in the Straits Settlements did receive it.<sup>687</sup>

<sup>684</sup> R. Lowe, 'Riches, Poverty and Progress' in K. Robbins (ed.), *The Short Oxford History of the British Isles: The British Isles, 1901-1951* (2002), pp. 197-226.

<sup>685</sup> Most Eurasians were oriented towards Europeans, spoke English and followed Christian faiths. They originated from offspring of either Portuguese or British and Asians. See Nagata, *Malaysian Mosaic*, 11 and 40-1.

<sup>686</sup> Maughan, *Far Eastern Tales*, 99 and 247-278.

<sup>687</sup> The circular represented an official reaction to a sexual scandal in Kenya the previous year involving an assistant district commissioner, an Askari and an African girl. Following the incident and bowing to growing political pressure the secretary of state for the colonies, Lord Crewe, issued an official note with two appendices. The first entailed a warning for future recruits of the Colonial Service highlighting the disgrace in case of concubinage with local women. The second, less explicit appendix was directed at those already present in the colonies. The Crewe Circular marked the advent of a more official and aloof British presence in the colonies, as opposed to the gung-ho attitude of more colourful agents in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time it reflected puritan and racist sentiments in Britain. According to Hyam, the step "remoralised the empire in a way which may in the long run have fatally undermined it." See: R. Hyam, 'Concubinage and the Colonial Service: The Crewe Circular (1909), *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 1986 (14/3), pp. 170-186.

All that said, it may simply be that soldiers regarded Eurasians at the time as part of the major communities for lack of better knowledge. It may also be that Eurasians themselves did not stress their origins. Worries about stigmatisation, tax liability and even loss of property played into this.<sup>688</sup>

The only person, who has remembered dealing with Eurasians, is earlier-cited Brian Lloyd. He claimed that he and his colleagues worked with Eurasian (as well as with Chinese and Malay) women, some of whom he recollected as beautiful. He professed that the men often chatted up their female colleagues, whom they then took to the movies. Lloyd maintained that even without such advances Eurasians fairly easily mingled with the British. He added that relations between British men and Chinese and Malay women would also occur.<sup>689</sup> Given that Lloyd's tour in Malaya only lasted for a few months, it is possible that he was not always able to distinguish between the diverse communities.

#### f) Aborigines

The scarcity of consequential interactions between soldiers and local civilians surprises least in the case of Malaya's aborigines.<sup>690</sup> Primitive (for western standards), shy and superstitious the latter populated the remote parts of the Malayan jungle. They avoided contact with either side in the emergency and rarely spoke even a few words of English. The only members of the security forces, who came into contact with the original inhabitants of Malaya, were SAS soldiers or police officers engaged in deep jungle penetrations or manning jungle forts.

John Leary has cited a 1947 census putting the total of aborigines at 34,737 and dividing them into three main groups: the Semang (5%, populating northern and northeast Malaya), the (Negrito) Senoi (62%, living in the central north) and the Orang Melayu Asli (33%, in the centre and south). These groups engaged either in subsistence living, hunting, semi-nomadic ways or built rudimentary settlements. Due to the emergency's dynamics two Senoi groups, the Semai and Temiar, became most entangled in the emergency.

Soon after the first communist wave of attack had faltered and the insurgents had been forced into the jungle, British authorities began to worry about a potential cooperation between the latter and aborigines – a collaboration which had already taken place during WWII. Not that the shy people directly posed a great threat to the security forces or the administration. Yet the aborigines could serve as eyes and ears for the rebels thus making the job of jungle patrols even more difficult. It is exactly what happened.

On the surface aboriginal services appeared coerced. However, those few who occupied themselves with tribal matters, among them staff of the Department of Aborigines in Kuala

<sup>688</sup> The latter was more of an issue for indigenous partners of Europeans but could also have consequences for their offspring. For a more in-depth analysis of such issues see: A. L. Stoler, 'Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia', Cooper & Stoler, *Tensions of Empire*, pp. 198-237.

<sup>689</sup> Interview, 8.8.2007.

<sup>690</sup> Several terms have been used to label the aboriginal people of Malaya. These range from the colonial 'proto-Malay' to 'Sakai' (connoting 'servant' or 'slave'), 'aborigine' (after 1955) and the final 'Orang Asli', made official in the 1960s. ('Asli' stands for 'original' in Malay.) See J. D. Leary, *Violence and the Dream People: The Orang Asli in the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960* (1995), p. 14.



Lumpur, eventually realised that the indigenous communities often had their own agendas, on occasion killing both insurgents and security forces. On the other hand, some supported the latter, for instance in so called Police Aboriginal Guards, or sided with the Malayan Communist Party's aborigine organisation, the ASAL. Frequently they worked for both sides. They accepted food, medicine and household items from the security forces and sought promised communist protection. Unfortunately for the authorities, the insurgents initially possessed stronger links.<sup>691</sup>

In view of the very rare encounters between British army personnel and aborigines, we need to stretch the scale of groups considered for this study. Only one of the three men, who have passed on meaningful insights, falls into the categories of servicemen defined in the introduction. They have come from the afore-mentioned Lieutenant-Colonel John Cross, who operated along the Thai border. Other references can be found in the testimony of Arpad Bacskai, who served with the Royal Australian Regiment/SASR. The third contribution has been passed on by Roy Follows, then a police officer and jungle fort commander.

Due to the gradual communist retreat into the deep jungle it is no coincidence that the first two men were engaged towards the end of the emergency. SAS squadrons typically tried to flush out the guerrillas from the remoter parts of the jungle. Cross for his part even conducted cross-border operations, during which he and his men relied on the support of aborigines. Like others, it took him considerable time to win over the shy forest dwellers. The lieutenant-colonel pointed out that this also owed to the decision of the Malayan authorities during the emergency to resettle aborigines outside the forest. Exposed to an unknown environment many had quickly perished. Those who had fled back to their original environment had guarded a deep hatred of the administration.<sup>692</sup>

The title of Cross memoir's – *A Face like a Chicken's Backside* – not only echoes his hosts' description of the author but also reveals a sound sense of humour and indigenous self-confidence. Any services they provided depended on the actions and attitudes of intruders, who in turn could take nothing for granted. What counted often more than perceived strength were small gestures, such as the provision of medication or the willingness to listen and learn. Both the security forces and the communists ran the risk of being left on their own, or worse, being killed if they ignored behavioural imperatives.

Perhaps the most concise, fitting and insightful summary of aboriginal attitudes, habits and experiences features in Roy Follows's memoirs. The latter's description of the Temiar reads at times like earlier explorers' accounts of the 'noble savages' encountered in Africa. To him they were:

... people from a time I and my people had left behind thousands of years ago. They knew nothing of firearms or helicopters [...] a pair of scissors was strange and wonderful in their eyes. They feared the spirits of the dead and put up with sickness and disease because they had no choice. Then the Communists came and told them that the white man was a devil who would kill and eat them, and they believed them. Now we, those same white men, had come and brought not death but medicines for their ailments, and told them that it was the

<sup>691</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3, 89, 183-9 and R. Follows, *The Jungle Beat: Fighting Terrorists in Malaya* (1999), p. 139.  
<sup>692</sup> Interview, 1983 with Charles Allen for BBC Radio 4, IWM, 8487.

Communists who were devils. [...] You couldn't be surprised if the aborigines were in a muddle [...] Yet, in their own surroundings they survived. They built their longhouses, they had fire and cooked, and with their blowpipes and poisoned arrows they could pick off a bird in a tree [...] Their logic did not work like ours; they had no written language and a limited vocabulary. [...] As a people they are peaceable, and one tribe will rarely, if ever, fight another. All they really want is to be left alone. Finding themselves then, as they were then, under pressure from the Communists on one side and Government forces on the other, they followed the only course open to them; they tried to placate both.

Unusually for a British veteran, Follows devoted considerable space in his memoirs to complex issues, such as ethnic categorisations, areas of living, farming traditions and eating habits. For this he drew to some extent from information provided by the Department of Aborigines.<sup>693</sup>

Arpad Bacskai for his part came into contact with Negritos. And like Cross and Follows he remembered his encounters with fascination:

They were a small, five foot two, brownish, curly-haired Negrito type [...]. They read everything into everything. Like for instance, if you had a meeting [...] whereas for you it was just another meeting with another group or person, for them they were already trying to interpret the spiritual side. As far as they were concerned, the spirits were in the trees, in the butterflies, in everywhere, in you. You could be ... maybe not a person. You could be the manifestation of the devil. So if the person you met was acting strange [...] it wasn't perhaps because they didn't like to see you or like the look of you. It was because they couldn't work out exactly what you represented [...] It took them a hell of a lot to be at ease with you.

The trooper admitted that the aborigines he met effectively served as shield for the few remaining communists in the forest. In so doing they made the job of Bacskai and his colleagues extremely knotty and exasperating. At one point the interviewee had to be restrained not to shoot the aborigines he was dealing with. Another unit did kill several Negritos thereby landing themselves in great troubles. Difficulties also beckoned for the interviewee and his colleagues because they contracted various diseases from the forest dwellers.<sup>694</sup>

Given these unusually insightful observations, one can assume that all three individuals had ample time to reflect on their encounters both during their missions and after. But Cross, Bacskai and Follows also differed from the average soldier (or veteran respectively) in that they accepted to live in dense jungle among people with uncertain loyalties. After their military tours the authors offered further proof of their unusual personalities. As mentioned earlier, Cross retired in Nepal. Bacskai also served in the Vietnam War before founding three companies in Australia. In the autumn of his life he has been very active in veterans' circles. Follows bought a jeep with a colleague when his tour ended and drove all the way back to Britain.

<sup>693</sup> Follows, *The Jungle Beat*, 126-7, 142-3 (quote) and 147-8.

<sup>694</sup> Interview, Australian Film Archive, June 2004, archive number 2029 ([www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.gov.au](http://www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.gov.au)).

g) (Non-European) Women and sexuality<sup>695</sup>

Sexual attitudes and relations between colonisers and colonised have attracted considerable academic interest.<sup>696</sup> Malaya is no exception in this. Ronald Hyam has held that in sexual terms "Things were fairly free and easy in Malaya, until the 1930s at least." (At that point, the authorities began to curb the frivolous activities.) The scholar has drawn attention to the fact that numerous villages and towns throughout Malaya hosted brothels. As if this supply did not suffice an early governor of Upper Perak entertained a veritable harem. Meanwhile, up to ninety percent of his compatriots in out-stations held local mistresses in the 1890s, of which not all seem to have acquiesced voluntarily. In 1914 Tamils staged a strike to protest, among other aspects, against the sexual abuse of their wives, daughters and work colleagues by overseers and managers, most of them white. Possibly to avoid such reactions certain planters in Johore were said to swap their wives. The local Chinese were Europeans' equals in (almost) every way when it came to sexuality. During the 1930s 6,000 Chinese prostitutes were reported to service their fellow male nationals (and probably other ethnicities, too).<sup>697</sup>

Even without that knowledge women held considerable fascination for British troops during the emergency. This is hardly surprising if one considers that the bulk were young National Servicemen and unmarried regulars. Few of the resulting interactions proved enduring though. Brief acquaintances with so called taxi dancers<sup>698</sup> and prostitutes proved to be more common than serious long-term relationships with Asian or European women, although the latter occurred. Even rarer were sincere liaisons between Asian men and European women but they, too, did happen according to military witnesses.<sup>699</sup> Hyam has cited allegations that some service wives repaid debts to Asian shopkeepers and landlords with sexual favours.<sup>700</sup>

Many affairs between service personnel and local women ended prematurely due to the interference of commanders and parents. Previously quoted Peter Franklin remembered a soldier in his squadron who fell in love with a Malayan nurse. Their affection proved in vain as both the commanding colonel and the woman's father did not allow them to extend their liaison.<sup>701</sup> Some Malay fathers allegedly threatened to publicly denounce their daughters if they dared marry non-Muslims. They even followed up with newspaper ads, if their daughters persisted.<sup>702</sup> It is doubtful that the military discouragement solely owed to the kind of racialism en vogue in Britain towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century or to fears of native deviance, which Philippa Levine has described.<sup>703</sup>

<sup>695</sup> It is obviously politically incorrect to automatically connect the two. Unfortunately, women in Malaya have often been quoted in connection with sexual services.

<sup>696</sup> Apart from Hyam's and Levin's recent contributions discussed in this section, one should also acknowledge earlier works on India and Africa, such as Kenneth Ballhatchet's *Race, Sex and Class Under the British Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics, 1793-1905* (1980) and Luise White's *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (1990).

<sup>697</sup> R. Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (1990), pp. 94, 109, 143 and 151.

<sup>698</sup> Women working at dance halls.

<sup>699</sup> Questionnaires filled out by anonymous and A. Elkington in July, 2007.

<sup>700</sup> Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*, 109.

<sup>701</sup> Questionnaire, mid July 2007.

<sup>702</sup> One or two veterans have mentioned such incidents but none actually seems to have seen such ads.

<sup>703</sup> P. Levine (ed.), *Gender and Empire (OHBECS)* (2004), pp. 135 and 139.

In view of the short and busy military tours, the authorities probably wished to prevent soldiers from being side-tracked by or burdened with relationship problems.

The interference might have contributed to a preference for short-lived adventures, i.e. prostitution. The latter was common in towns and cities, especially Kuala Lumpur and Singapore,<sup>704</sup> thus marking a reversion of the crackdowns in the 1920s. (In fact, those efforts had already been blunted immediately prior to and during the Japanese occupation.<sup>705</sup>) As a consequence, the authorities seem to have relapsed into the kind of ordinary regulation introduced in the middle of the 19th century.<sup>706</sup> Derek Blake claimed that prostitutes were regularly rounded up to be tested for venereal diseases.<sup>707</sup> The authorities did so with good reason. George Tullis estimated that up to 40% of British soldiers stationed in and around Kuala Lumpur contracted sexually transmitted diseases. He did not offer proof for this estimation but recollected several cases in his own unit. According to the NMBVA's secretary, the situation grew so problematic that the authorities set up special facilities, where soldiers returning from night sprees could 'clean themselves'. Condoms were also widely distributed among troops. Still, men became unavailable for patrols and convoys after sexual encounters, which, if proven, resulted in twenty-eight days in prison for self-inflicted harm.<sup>708</sup> Unsurprisingly, no veteran has freely admitted that he visited brothels in Malaya, fell ill or ended up in confinement.

However, above anecdotes may paint a slightly distorted picture. Many servicemen, particularly those stationed in small camps outside centres of population, were never tempted to stray into red-light districts either for lack of opportunities<sup>709</sup> or fear. Due to the army going out of its way to warn of venereal diseases, many servicemen abandoned secretly held plans to lose their virginity in Malaya. One who preferred to be on the safe side was the afore-cited Leslie Ives, who recounted his activities during leave on the popular island of Penang:

Evenings were mostly spent at the renowned City Lights Ballroom in Georgetown. [...] It housed a gorgeous array of young pretty females known as 'taxi dancers' [...] Many of these girls pursued other nocturnal activities of an intimate nature – and many assignations were made on the dance floor. [...] My favourite lassie was called Shirley I think. [...] My fellow leave mates dared me to take her out in the conventional sense. I was surprised when she accepted – so were they! [...] She was probably surprised that I did not seek her professional favours overnight – but I resisted the temptations [...]. However in my mind's eye still lurked the images from the V.D. film we had seen en-route to the east. [...] <sup>710</sup>

Contrary to the situation in Indochina, few veterans have alluded to European women in the services or among the local population. One who has is Captain Robert Bonner, at the time a

<sup>704</sup> Questionnaire filled out by David Sleeth 12.7.2007, a former sapper and eventual NCO.

<sup>705</sup> Bayly & Harper, *Forgotten Armies*, 57-8 and 230.

<sup>706</sup> Levine, *Gender and Empire*, 144-5. See also her earlier *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (2003).

<sup>707</sup> Interview 11.8.1985, IWM, 8943.

<sup>708</sup> Interview, 25.4.2007.

<sup>709</sup> Tony Hamilton for instance claimed that he and his colleagues were simply too tired or busy to visit towns and their various establishments. See interview 19.9.2006.

<sup>710</sup> Ives, *A Musket for the King*, 101.

young lieutenant. In the published accounts of his battalion's tour he mentioned a Ms. Barbara Rigby of the Women's Voluntary Service. Her main task consisted in looking after a collection of records, games, paperback thrillers, table tennis and pool equipment.<sup>711</sup> Other than that, regimental journals often contain images featuring wives of NCOs and officers but not of their offspring.<sup>712</sup> Scrutinizing the experience of soldiers' families or servicewomen in Malaya would undoubtedly add a social, ethnic and cultural touch to an otherwise rather technical remembrance of the territory and the emergency.

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<sup>711</sup> Bonner, *Jungle Bashers*, 70.

<sup>712</sup> See for instance *The Royal Hampshire Regimental Journal*, August 1955.

## Chapter 6: “The Indochina War gave me a love for these people and this country.” – French soldiers’ stances on Indochinese land and people

French veterans considered for this research appear to have taken a comparatively keen interest in Indochina and its people during their tours and beyond. The result has often been very vivid and detailed depictions of people, population centres, infrastructure, climate, vegetation and wildlife.

(Ex-)soldiers’ interest in Indochina and the Indochinese has habitually been coupled with affection on the one hand and melancholy on the other in view of the war’s result. The journalist Jean Lartéguy has termed this *Le mal jaune*,<sup>713</sup> describing it as “a sort of nostalgia”. Pierre Schoendoerffer told an interviewer in the 1990s: “It is a place that still moves me deeply. The Indochina War gave me a love for these people and this country.”<sup>714</sup> Even in 1950, when the balance tipped in favour of the Viet Minh, *TIME* reporter André Laguerre found morale among French forces remarkably high. He quoted a young military engineer as stating: “I like it out here. It’s adventure. I feel I’m useful, and I like the Vietnamese.”<sup>715</sup>

Servicemen’s fascination is somewhat startling given the conflict’s vicious nature and blurred battle lines. Officers and NCOs stationed in small outposts for instance lived in constant fear of being betrayed by their own, non-European men. Commander Vandenberghe, who formed and led a unit of former POWs, was assassinated by the latter. Villagers could claim not to have spotted guerrillas even though CEFEO troops had battled the latter in their location. In cinemas young men hurled grenades on soldiers sitting below them. As a result of such attacks, bar and restaurant owners had to fence in their establishments’ windows.<sup>716</sup> Alain Delon remembered soldiers’ caution when accepting foodstuff from children.<sup>717</sup> Similarly, soldiers suspected that many prostitutes acted as Viet Minh agents. Ordinary sightseeing tours, too, could involve high risks. Two colleagues of the former infantry sergeant and writer Roger Delpey were almost drowned by a sampan’s helmsman on a river near Saigon.<sup>718</sup> All these dangers were coupled with a climate that featured everything from stiffening heat and humidity to cold, damp evenings.

If one believes veterans, such dangers could not alter the naturally cordial and outgoing French character. As later Commandant Léger argued in an interview: “... the [Frenchman] has always had the quality of blending in with the people he colonised.”<sup>719</sup> General de Bollardière, too, observed at the time that his men easily and willingly mingled with the locals despite the risks involved.<sup>720</sup> Yet prudence should rule when absorbing such statements. In view of communist propaganda in France at the time, which described French soldiers as murdering and pillaging Huns, veterans might have been keen on correcting their image. Generally, one needs to consider

<sup>713</sup> It is also the title of one of his books, published in 1962.

<sup>714</sup> H. Faas & T. Page (eds.), *Requiem: By the Photographers who Died in Vietnam and Indochina* (1997), pp. 46-9.

<sup>715</sup> *TIME*, 28.8.1950 (www.time.com).

<sup>716</sup> *Paris Match*, no. 84, 28.10.1950 and no. 173, 5-12.7.1952.

<sup>717</sup> E. Haymann, *Alain Delon: splendeurs et mystères d’une superstar* (1998), p. 19.

<sup>718</sup> Delpey, *Soldats de la boue*, 91-2.

<sup>719</sup> Interview, 13.8.1998, SHD/DITEEX 3K 42 - V - (12AV 271).

<sup>720</sup> De Bollardière, *Bataille d’Alger*, 53-4.

the various possible aspects that could have influenced takes on Indochina and the Indochinese. Among them is the question of how much soldiers already knew about the latter.

### Imperial culture?

A closer look reveals that opportunities to read or hear about the empire in general and Indochina in particular habitually depended on social, professional and regional circumstances. On the whole potential (Southeast Asian) influences for the average French, especially from rural areas, did not abound. As a consequence, imperial enthusiasm knew limits.

The pre-Indochina part of Claude Corniquet's detailed online memoirs, for instance, hardly mentions imperial imprints. A corporal in Indochina, Corniquet came from humble origins but grew up in the river port city of Rouen.<sup>721</sup> Equally, one has to search long and hard for Indochinese connections in the early careers of those military figures interviewed by SHD's staff, most of them officers during the war.<sup>722</sup> But several of these had African and Middle Eastern stints prior to their involvement in the Indochina War. This suggests that ignorance of Southeast Asia did not equal a general lack of imperial consciousness. As in the British case, it also hints at a generational change. It is telling that the young nurse Geneviève de Galard only cited her uncle's Arab pony and her crusading ancestors as non-European influences during her childhood. This is so despite the fact that she grew up in a strongly Catholic family of the *haute bourgeoisie*, which counted army and naval officers among its members. It is not until Galard attended a Dominican (secondary) school that she read books by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and Marshall Lyautey. After her studies she travelled first to Italy, Spain and Norway before visiting Morocco. Galard's immersion into France's Southeast Asian empire did not happen until her service in the Indochina War. Even her motivation for the latter was not necessarily driven by imperial enthusiasm:

I dreamt of new perspectives, generous adventures. In a more simple way I wanted to make myself useful and I didn't envision a life without devotion to others or pursuit of an ideal. In addition, having grown up surrounded by tenderness and solitude, but a bit too smothered by my often anxious mother, I aspired to discover more immense horizons.<sup>723</sup>

The wider population appears to have increasingly lacked such cravings after WWII. General Salan later complained in his memoirs: "France was far away and little interested... She found this Indochinese affair – that's what it was called – expensive and never ending."<sup>724</sup> Salan, called

<sup>721</sup> <http://ccorniquet.100webspaces.net>.

<sup>722</sup> Between 1997 and 2001 staff interviewed 57 veterans of France's 20<sup>th</sup> century wars. Of these 21 served in Indochina or, in two cases, dealt with the war in metropolitan functions. Among the interviewees only Commandant Paul Léger and General George Buis were born in Morocco and Indochina respectively. It should be added that staff did not specifically ask veterans questions about colonies. However, one would expect the (ex-)soldiers to have referred to empire, had they been marked by them in their child- and adulthood. See H. Lemoine, S. Laurent, S. Simmonet and G. Zeller (Ministère de la défense, état-major de l'armée de terre, service historique), *Histoire orale: inventaire analytique des sous-séries 3K et 4K, Tome I & II* (1997 and 2001).  
<sup>723</sup> G. de Galard, *Une femme à Dien Bien Phu* (2003), pp. 11-30 (quote p. 26).  
<sup>724</sup> Salan, *Mémoires*, 441.

'the mandarin' because of his long service in Asia, could have added that his own troops arrived largely ignorant and in some cases disinterested. One of the few exceptions was General de Bollardi re whose grandfather, uncle and father had served in Indochina (under Gallieni). His ancestors had described in detail the territory's rice fields, deltas, mountains and bays.<sup>725</sup>

Academic literature has largely corroborated the limits of imperial culture in France. Stuart Persell has pointed out that those engrossed by colonies during the early years of overseas expansion tended to be officers in provincial garrisons, the clergy, aristocrats, the *petit bourgeoisie*, intellectuals, humanitarians, journalists, civil servants, academics, economists and businessmen. To the more republican-minded colonies often evoked unfavourable images of the *ancien r gime* and the Napoleonic Empire due to the latter's involvement in empire-building. For the masses of French peasants and shopkeepers interaction with the colonies had little or only indirect relevance.<sup>726</sup> That said, the Catholic Church, recognising the potential in conquered territories, spread the gospel early on, not least to raise funds. For that however, it rarely sought popular, metropolitan involvement, despite the considerable circulation of publications like *L'Echo des missions africaines*.

Critics struggled to understand why France should spend roughly eight billion francs for colonial expansion between 1850 and 1913.<sup>727</sup> Taking up the colonial lobby's argument of *mise en valeur*,<sup>728</sup> they pushed for a law in 1900, requiring colonies to cover their expenses and to repay government loans. Economic gains from the colonies, usually flowing into uncompetitive French companies, remained actually small: imports to France amounted to only 12% and exports to 18.8% in 1929.

The press had mixed feelings towards colonial societies in particular. The racism and exploitation of black labourers in the Antilles provoked outcries in Paris as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century. During the 1950s and 1960s journalists drew attention to the inherent injustice of French rule in Algeria. Such bad press did little to encourage emigration, which never reached British proportions. On the eve of WWII the number of *colons* stood at 1,475,000, most of which had settled in North Africa and New Caledonia. They included large numbers of Italians, Maltese, Spanish, Indians and individuals from La R union.

Imperial enthusiasts sought to change public perceptions but their numbers were small. Active members in the twelve major colonial associations stood at a meagre 5,000 in 1913. Only the biggest and earliest, such as the *Comit  de l'Asie fran aise*, reached a wider audience. Their members mostly originated from the mercantile middle classes of French port cities, such as Marseille, Bordeaux and Le Havre with Lyon being the exception. They offered scholarships, held speeches and wrote in newspapers or in their own publications, such as the *Revue de l'Asie fran aise*.<sup>729</sup> The problem was not least that the repeated discussions about *mise en valeur*

<sup>725</sup> De Bollardi re, *Bataille d'Alger, bataille d'homme*, 49.

<sup>726</sup> Persell, *The French Colonial Lobby*, 1-3.

<sup>727</sup> Even in the 1950s state consul and head of the civilian cabinet of General de Lattre in Indochina, Alain De Lacoste-Lareymondie, remembered how colleagues in the metropolitan administration advocated retreat even from North Africa so as to focus on the more crucial European affairs. See interview, 21.10.1997, SHD 3K 23 – I – (12 AV 136).

<sup>728</sup> 'Development' (for commercial reasons).

<sup>729</sup> The main protagonist's parents in Marguerite Duras semi-biographical *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* (1950) were lured to Indochina by Pierre Loti's lectures. See p. 23.



versus further expansion, assimilation versus association <sup>or</sup> imperial tariffs versus colonial, economic sovereignty reflected inherent dilemmas rather than potential.

Still, colonial issues made inroads. Despite its name, the *parti colonial* represented not a party but a group of legislators in parliament, whose members shared an interest in overseas territories and shaped imperial policy. One of theirs served in the Ministry of Colonies after 1894. Yet the latter did not oversee the entire empire. Algeria was placed under the Interior Ministry, Tunisia and Morocco under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. By 1918 the core of the lobby's leadership had already disappeared while the ministries increasingly drove initiatives themselves. The Great Depression and growing tensions between settlers and indigenous populations in the colonies did their part in dampening imperial fervour. As a consequence, only about ten deputies referred to the colonies in the 1932 election. By the same token, the *Ecole nationale de la France d'outre-mer*, which prepared administrators and judges for imperial service, attracted only 71 candidates for 28 places between 1908 and 1914.<sup>730</sup>

Some of them would later contribute to the small expatriate community in Indochina, most of it initially confined to Cochinchina. Not until the conquest of the Tonkin in the 1880s and 1890s did greater waves follow, among them roughly 30,000 soldiers. Particularly the north of Vietnam attracted some interest from poorer and overpopulated French provinces, such as Brittany, Corsica, the Alps and the Provence, as well as from the business communities of the coastal cities. Encouraged by the developmental initiatives of Governor-General Paul Doumer, young males took up jobs as civil servants, custom officers, engineers and foremen. Despite that, the expatriate community hardly ever went beyond the 1930 peak of 40,000.<sup>731</sup>

Odile Goerg has come to comparable conclusions when studying the impact on French provinces of industrial fairs with colonial elements, geographical societies, touring "black (i.e. African) villages", colonial troops stationed in France, advertising, cinemas and (colonial) propaganda. She has admitted that not all messages conveyed were colonial and that the effect of these stimuli are difficult to measure: "These representations went beyond the world colonised by France: the frontiers of the continent were vague and spilled over into a mythical Orient, passing imperceptibly from Egypt to the Arabia of the thousand and one nights."<sup>732</sup> Goerg has also identified the dominance of African over Asian influences in these representations.

Martin Evans for his part remained equally ambivalent in regard to visitors' motivation to the often cited 1931 Colonial Exhibition. On the other hand, he has reminded us that colonial facets were incorporated into the 1878, 1889 and 1900 world fairs, as well as into Marseille's imperial exhibits of 1906 and 1920.<sup>733</sup> Picasso's cubism in turn partly resulted from his analysis of African masks. Colonial images also found their way into stamps and music, most notably Verdi's

<sup>730</sup> Paragraph and previous page based on J. Thobie, G. Meynier, C. Cocquery-Vidrovitch & CH.-R. Ageron, *L'histoire de la France coloniale, 1914-1990* (1990), pp. 561-70 and Persell, *The French Colonial Lobby*, 1-6 and 140-58.

<sup>731</sup> G. de Gantès, 'Migration to Indochina: Proof of the Popularity of Colonial Empire?' in Chafer & Sackur, *Promoting the Colonial Idea*, 15-27.

<sup>732</sup> O. Goerg, 'The French Provinces and 'Greater France'', *ibid.*, 82-101 (quote on p. 95).

<sup>733</sup> Jacques Raphael-Leygues, then a commissioner in the navy, overheard an officer comparing a sunset near My Tho to one of Gauguin's landscapes. See J. Raphael-Leygues, *Ponts de lianes: missions en Indochine, 1945 1954* (1976), p. 67.

*Aida*.<sup>734</sup> Even so, the broader public did not necessarily visit galleries, museums and opera venues. Even if they had, they would have struggled to recognise influences of France's colonies there, least of all Indochinese ones.

As the next section will demonstrate, the territory did not feature high on military agendas either prior to the Indochina War.

### Preferred military destination?

Aldrich, among others, has held that the French military was inherently linked to the empire through conquests and garrison duties.<sup>735</sup> That implies some familiarity with Indochina. Yet only a small fraction, including the remnants of the *Armée d'Indochine*, could have staked such a claim in 1945, and that section was soon shipped back to France. Most former Free French, elements of the *Armée d'Afrique* and even the *Coloniale* had never set foot on Indochinese soil.

It is worth looking at the pre-Indochina careers of individuals involved in the conflict to measure their imperial (and Asian) 'credentials'. African-born *Commandant* Paul Léger for example, an NCO during the war, picked up on the way to Southeast Asia that Japanese troops were still stationed in the territory and had to be disarmed. Léger admitted that he and his colleagues were not prepared either for communist opposition or for Chinese troops marching through the streets of Vientiane (Laos).<sup>736</sup>

General Hugo Geoffrey,<sup>737</sup> then a second lieutenant in the Foreign Legion, didn't know what to expect either upon entering Saigon in March 1946. What he learned, he gathered from veteran legionnaires, who described the territory "almost as a paradise" where one could get anything, marry and eat well. He had caught wind of the Japanese occupation and the presence of the Viet Minh, which he viewed as "something communist".<sup>738</sup> Similarly, Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Denis, at the time a captain, confessed to knowing nothing of the Indochinese people and land when he arrived in the Tonkin during 1948.<sup>739</sup> Such recollections undermine to some degree Bodin's argument that Indochina represented the most desired destination for soldiers and administrators. Caution is also advised regarding his claim that many servicemen had learned of Southeast Asia at school, read imperial adventure stories, had family members with colonial connections or that some had visited the colonial exhibition. All this would sound more convincing if the author had cited more than two protagonists, one of them being General de Bollardière.<sup>740</sup>

The unfamiliarity of army personnel with Indochina had its reasons: In the absence of planes the first imperial force in line was often the navy, which was responsible for colonial administration well into the 1880s. Only later did businessmen and government officials replace them. Naval

<sup>734</sup> Evans, *Empire and Culture*, 1 and 15-6.

<sup>735</sup> Aldrich, *Greater France*, 131.

<sup>736</sup> Interview, 6.8.1998, SHD/DITEEX, 3K 42 – III – (12AV 269-70). Much of Laos had been temporarily accorded to China at the Potsdam Conference.

<sup>737</sup> Admittedly of Austrian origin but naturalised in 1952.

<sup>738</sup> Interview, 14.5.1998, SHD/DITEEX 3K 37– III – (12AV 249).

<sup>739</sup> Interview, 5.8.1998, SHD/DITEEX 3K 41 – II – (12AV 282).

<sup>740</sup> Bodin, *Les combattants français face à la guerre d'Indochine*, 29-31.

officers also proved instrumental in establishing a foothold in Cochinchina, keeping in mind earlier missionary incursions.<sup>741</sup> Coincidentally, it was also a former naval officer, Admiral Thierry d'Argenlieu, who became Indochina's first high-commissioner upon the French return in 1945.

The army's focus had always laid elsewhere. As Girardet has noted: "So many factors which, in what one could call the sentimental geography of the French Army, have contributed to give North Africa a privileged place...."<sup>742</sup> That said, the two most famous figures of the French Empire, Gallieni and Lyautey, were originally army officers and enjoyed spells in Indochina. After 'pacifying' the northern areas of the Tonkin, Lyautey headed the military office of the territory's government-general in the 1890s. Then again, it was a vacation in Algeria during 1878, which had triggered his interest in the world beyond France. Moreover, he and his mentor Gallieni became best known for their pioneering roles in Madagascar and Morocco.

The army's African tradition largely continued with the generals of the two world wars, Forre, Gamelin, Pétain and Weygand.<sup>743</sup> None of these men ever toured Indochina. Forre served as military engineer throughout the rest of the empire before joining the French high command during WWI. Pétain, the defender of Verdun and future head of Vichy France, was responsible for crushing the Abd-el Krim rebellion in the Rif Mountains during the early 1920s. The least imperially-minded of all was de Gaulle, even though he had a short stint in Beirut during the early 1930s.<sup>744</sup> The exception to the rule is General Joffre, who operated in Indochina and Formosa between 1884 and 1888.<sup>745</sup>

Strangely, the senior cadres more familiar with Southeast Asia were often sidelined or passed over prior, during or after the Indochina War. General Marcel Alessandri was dispatched to Indochina in 1939, from where he orchestrated the retreat of French troops into China six years later. As commander for North Vietnam he was held accountable for the ill-fated retreat from Dong Khe, Cao Bang and Lang Son in 1950, and was recalled to France. His erstwhile superior, General Gabriel Sabattier, was stationed in Hanoi in 1923 and became military attaché to China between 1934-38. Despite that, he was placed into the army reserve after WWII. General Roger Blaizot passed a few months in Indochina during 1936 and prepared the CEFEO from India during WWII. Yet it was General Leclerc who led the French re-entry into Indochina in 1945. Blaizot did return to assume the role of commander-in-chief but only from 1948 to 1949. General Raoul Salan for his part could look back on three long tours in the Tonkin prior to the Indochina War. Although he twice commanded the expeditionary corps he was always regarded as a temporary stand-in for more experienced colleagues. Lieutenant-Colonel Langlais also counted several tours in Indochina prior to the war. He shot to fame during the battle of Dien Bien Phu but was overshadowed by the less accustomed Bigeard. The Generals Leclerc, Valluy, Carpentier, de Lattre, Navarre and Ely did not know the territory either prior to taking over as commanders-in-

<sup>741</sup> Aldrich, *Greater France*, 131-2.

<sup>742</sup> Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France*, 260.

<sup>743</sup> In contrast, Marshal Foch spent the bulk of his career in France.

<sup>744</sup> R. Holmes (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Military History* (2001), pp. 305, 499 and 994.

<sup>745</sup> www.anai-asso.org.

chief. Navarre was even appointed precisely because of his unfamiliarity with Southeast Asia. Paris hoped that he would introduce a new approach.<sup>746</sup>

By the same token, the many illustrious colonial regiments of the French Army habitually defended and patrolled Africa not Southeast Asia.<sup>747</sup> They included the *zouaves* and *chasseurs d'Afrique*, as well as the *spahis* and *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The imperial force par excellence, the Foreign Legion, chose as its headquarters Sidi-bel-Abbès, despite campaigns in the Tonkin during the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>748</sup> Significantly, these troops were numerous in the Indochina War. Particularly Africans were insufficiently prepared for the physical and psychological challenges thrown at them in Southeast Asia. The later General Le Chatelier initially commanded a battalion of Algerian *tirailleurs* in Indochina. When the war ended he observed French and African prisoners being released by the Viet Minh. While officers had remained largely unaffected by the brainwashing, some African troops passing by were singing the International. Le Chatelier pessimistically mused in his diary: "These people there will contaminate Africa and our years there are counted."<sup>749</sup> The Viet Minh, too, was unimpressed by the African soldiers. In captured documents – admittedly littered with racial stereotypes and derogatory remarks about the enemy's capacity and morale – the authors took particular aim at non-Europeans. They highlighted that even the sturdy *tabor* were "quickly demoralised" if attacked in force. Algerians were deemed "superstitious", West Africans "not intelligent".<sup>750</sup>

The African influences also became evident during the two world wars and the years between. From 1914 to 1918 almost 500,000 African troops and workers contributed to the war effort in France. During the interwar years 40% of all 'French' troops originated from the Maghreb.<sup>751</sup> In comparison, 43,430 Indochinese were sent to the European and Middle Eastern theatres between 1915 and 1918 after an initial refusal to raise any. There, they constituted four combat battalions and fifteen logistical units. In addition, 48,981 skilled and non-skilled workers served in France during the war.<sup>752</sup> In view of the Viet Minh's effectiveness during the Indochina War, it is ironic and telling that the French Army listed the Indochinese last in terms of combat effectiveness "against a civilised enemy" during the interwar years.<sup>753</sup>

The sixty-eight officers elected to parliament between 1945 and 1962 were more likely to have African than Asian traces in their CV, too. Colonel Pierre de Chevigné, who became secretary of state for war and minister for national defence in the Pflimlin government, had served as high-commissioner of Madagascar between 1947 and 1950. Marshal Pierre Koenig acted as minister for defence under Mendès-France. He had been the hero of Bir-Hakeim, commander of the French forces in the Libyan and Tunisian campaigns and general inspector of the French

<sup>746</sup> Dalloz, *Dictionnaire de la guerre d'Indochine*, 11-2, 35-6, 48, 88-9, 130-8, 167, 218-19 and 222-4.

<sup>747</sup> *Tirailleurs indochinois* regiments never equalled the prestige of African units.

<sup>748</sup> Aldrich, *Greater France*, 131-4.

<sup>749</sup> SHD, box 1KT 442.

<sup>750</sup> 'Traductions des documents VM faisant état des connaissances ennemies sur nos ouvrages de défense dans le L.K. 3 et notre organisation militaire', le chef de bataillon Levain au chef du 3<sup>e</sup> bureau, Commandement des forces terrestres du Nord Vietnam, état-major, 2<sup>e</sup> bureau, Hanoi, 11.8.1953, SHAT 2353.

<sup>751</sup> Clayton, *The Wars of French Decolonization*, 4-5.

<sup>752</sup> www.anai-asso.org. The editors have not explained whether expatriates born or residing in Indochina are included in these figures. Their percentage would have been small at any rate.

<sup>753</sup> General Staff/War Office, *Handbook of the French Army*, 160.

Army in North Africa. Despite the Indochina War's prominence after 1945 only seven of these men had actually served there, two of them prior to the outbreak of the conflict. In comparison, seventeen had at one point or another set foot on African soil (in some cases on top of a spell in Indochina).<sup>754</sup>

The lure of Indochina remained limited even during the conflict itself. André Thabaut, a former military doctor, pointed out that the best graduates of the *École de service de santé* opted for North African postings. Those with lesser grades were sent to Indochina. Despite claiming that many men of his generation were inspired by the desire to restore the empire, Thabaut opted for a tour in Germany out of convenience. Incidentally, he became part of the urgent reinforcements for Southeast Asia.<sup>755</sup>

All these aspects need to be taken into account when studying military recollections of Indochina and the war, to which we shall now turn.

### Infrastructure, population centres, work/living conditions and health

Several French servicemen considered for this study commented in considerable depth on Indochina's man-made environment. Unsurprisingly, they reflected more on population centres than communications. The 'preference' for the former owed not only to potential entertainment and interaction with locals. The Viet Minh increasingly targeted streets, tracks and bridges, forcing soldiers on planes and boats. A railway line leading to the Chinese border, for instance, changed owners to the effect that it was the Viet Minh who used it and the French who attacked it.<sup>756</sup>

Allusions to roads often surface in connection with the *route coloniale 4* (RC4) linking Cao Bang and Lang Son. The latter became known as the 'road of death' due to the frequent ambushes along its steep and winding course, which were flanked by dense vegetation. The road's surprising narrowness mirrored perhaps the limit of French colonial development in the apparent 'pearl of the empire' without inviting such soldierly insinuations. The RC4 had been built in 1911 and had again come under French control in 1947. Its precarious state and course meant that it could take convoys up to fifteen days to reach Cao Bang (presumably from Hanoi). When insurgents annihilated 50 trucks killing 140 soldiers, the high command decided to abandon the road and provision the garrisons of Cao Bang and Dong Khe by air. By the same token, the train journey from Saigon to Nha Trang was frequently interrupted by attacks and could easily take four days.<sup>757</sup>

Former lieutenant with the Foreign Legion, Raymond Lescastreyres, alluded to another road, the equally famous RC1, aka *route mandarine*, along the Annamese coast.<sup>758</sup> By 1953 the freely

<sup>754</sup> E. Duhammel, 'De l'épée à la toge (Les officiers au Palais Bourbon de 1945 à 1962)' in Forcade, Duhammel & Vial, *Militaires en République*, 363-71.

<sup>755</sup> Thabaut, *Médecin lieutenant au 1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon Muong*: Indochine (1954-1955), pp. 14-17.

<sup>756</sup> Interview with Commandant Paul Léger, 13.8.1998, SHD/DITEEX 3K 42 - V - (12AV 271).

<sup>757</sup> *Paris Match*, no. 84, 28.10.1950 and no. 173, 5-12.7.1952.

<sup>758</sup> [www.duhamel.bz/indochine/1953.htm](http://www.duhamel.bz/indochine/1953.htm).

roaming Viet Minh had mined this once busy road. The abandoned villages between the latter and the sea served as hideouts and storage places for the communist guerrilla. The danger associated with the RC1 earned the zone the name *rue sans joie*.<sup>759</sup>

In contrast, then Lieutenant-Colonel Massu, found the large Pont Doumer, which bridged the Red River on the way to Hanoi, still unscathed in 1945. Its solid construction prompted a proud description on his part. Named after Governor Paul Doumer, the bridge had been intended as a symbol of France's power and had marked the advent of the industrialised age in Indochina.<sup>760</sup>

While the Japanese do not appear to have dismantled railway lines to the same extent as in Malaya, they destroyed other settings. In a lengthy article *Médecin inspecteur* Général Régis Forrisier described how returning French troops found a medical infrastructure completely pillaged and ravaged by the former invaders.<sup>761</sup>

Because of their size and their military headquarters Saigon/Cholon, Hanoi and Haiphong have surfaced fairly frequently in veterans' accounts. The view usually taken was that the southern city stood for relative security and a bustling nightlife, including drugs and prostitution. In contrast, Hanoi and Haiphong seemed to emanate a stronger atmosphere of war. André Thabaut remembered:

Although the battle rages in the north, in Dien Bien Phu (it's April 24), here in Saigon the first impression is not that of a capital of a country at war. Of course, one crosses path with many military personnel dressed in various uniforms in the streets of the city in the course of this end of the week [...] But they wear 'leisure uniforms' and seem to calmly profit from their 'time off'.

The picture changed markedly once the doctor flew north and passed through Haiphong, where he noticed that: "Few or no military personnel in city dresses and out for a good time in the streets but frequent passing-by of trucks crammed with soldiers in combat fatigue, helmets and arms. The curfew starts at nine in the evening. Here, it's war!"<sup>762</sup> Yet images could deceive. Then Lieutenant Simon, arriving in Saigon in 1951, sensed the lurking danger behind the beauty and bustle:

... the whole is gigantic as Saigon-Cholon gathers three million inhabitants. One can't imagine the beauty of the French houses. The architecture differs little from the one applied to the large villas on the Côte d'Azur [...] But the layout is more grandiose as there is no scarcity of terrain. [...] The area of Cholon (half of the total surface, two-third of the population) is entirely populated by Chinese. It's very curious to watch. Around ten in the evening, everybody is in the streets. Every family sets up its table [...], sits down and dines by buying dishes from the rolling kitchen [...]. Smoke and aromas rise everywhere. There is not an inch of free pavement [...] The 'rickshaws' represent a national industry; they are so frequent that [...] one half of the population

<sup>759</sup> 'Street without joy'. This is also the title of Bernard Fall's book published in 1961.

<sup>760</sup> Nguyen Van Ky, 'Le model français' in: G. Boudarel and Nguyen Van Ky, *Hanoi 1936-1996: du drapeau rouge au billet vert* (1997), p. 60.

<sup>761</sup> 'Le service de santé au cours de la guerre d'Indochine' *Revue Médecine et Armées* (1991). Contained in Forissier's private collection, 1K 665, SHD.

<sup>762</sup> Thabaut, *Médecin lieutenant au 1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon Muong*, 26 and 29.

pushes the other one. [...] Nevertheless, the war is close. Yesterday, I dined to the sound of guns. [...] The areas of the centre are always calm. After six in the evening, all French stroll around in civilian clothes, run errands or drink lime juice on the terraces of the cafes. But the more one walks towards the countryside, the more dangerous the roads become. [...] The suburban areas serve as major buffers. The terrorists show up there freely.<sup>763</sup>

Vice versa, Hanoi had its peaceful areas. Even in 1953/4 Geneviève de Galard enjoyed visiting the city's Small and Large Lakes along which young lovers were promenading. She also discovered a circle of writers and journalists who regularly met in the city's bars. It included Jean Lartéguy, Jules Roy, Graham Greene and Lucien Bodard. It prompted de Galard to proclaim in her memoirs: "How far one felt from the battles! Hanoi was the relaxation of the warrior."<sup>764</sup> Later General Guy Méry, too, found Hanoi "extremely lively" and "very nice" – until it passed into the hands of the Viet Minh. It struck him that within 48 hours bistros and shops were closed while individuals, previously allocated to certain blocks, began to dictate daily life. Hanoi became, in Méry's words, "a dead city".<sup>765</sup> Such notions suggest that French rule had brought life and happiness while its end resulted in darkness.

As intriguing as some of the veterans' descriptions of cities are, they leave out important aspects. In the case of Saigon it is the climate of division, racism and financial speculation Philippe Franchini has called to mind. The city was home to a deeply divided society consisting of 12,000 Europeans (by 1930) surrounded by, but largely separated from, various non-western communities.<sup>766</sup> These included Vietnamese, Khmer, Cham, Malays, Yemenites, Indians and Chinese. At the centre of the multicultural city stood the symbol of speculation, the powerful *Banque d'Indochine*.<sup>767</sup> Despite this and other large institutions, Saigon gave off a provincial whiff. This partly owed to the mostly middle-ranked French employees and functionaries, who enjoyed a higher status than they would have in France. Key to this was the exclusion of Asians from neighbourhoods, professions and entertainment as well as the use of *tutoiement*,<sup>768</sup> particularly vis-à-vis the *boys and boyesses* looking after their household. They also treated Eurasians with contempt, as did Asians. The Cité Herault, populated by the former, saw the worst Viet Minh-led massacres in September 1945.<sup>769</sup>

Hanoi's strategic position and special structure have not echoed in recollections either. One of the oldest Asian cities – founded in 1010 – it has absorbed a large number of rural escapees over the centuries. The immigrants have settled in specific neighbourhoods (phuong) according to their origins and professions. The influx led to Hanoi's division into the imperial city and the

<sup>763</sup> Simon, *Chroniques de Cochinchine*, 20-2.

<sup>764</sup> De Galard, *Une femme à Dien Bien Phu*, 41.

<sup>765</sup> Interview, 26.11.1996, SHD/DITTEX, 3K 4 - V - (12AV 16).

<sup>766</sup> The colonial divisions were most clearly symbolised by the famous *Cercle sportif saigonais*. Traditionally neither Asians nor *petits blancs* (poor whites. See section on expatriates) were permitted entry.

<sup>767</sup> Founded in 1875, the bank was initially meant to issue money for Indochina and the French possessions in India. But it also began to offer accounts and loans while engaging in trading and commerce. In 1898 it extended its operations to China. Despite its small staff, it turned into the largest and most powerful of France's colonial banks. Yet WWII, the Indochina and the (second) Vietnam War forced its departure. In 1972 it entered the Suez Group where it was split up and re-emerged as *Banque Indosuez* in 1975. See: Meuleau, *Des pionniers en Extrême-Orient*, 11-3, 17-9, 576-7 and 579-80.

<sup>768</sup> Addressing Asians with 'tu' rather than the more polite 'vous'.

<sup>769</sup> Franchini, 'La cité blanche' in P. Franchini, *Saigon 1925-1945*, 26-83.

over thirty boroughs, occupied by artisans and merchants. The city's eventual name – it changed several times – signifies 'between two waters'. These are the Red River and the Tô Lich, both of which have offered a natural protection in times of war but also posed threats. Building, maintaining and improving dykes, channels and lakes has been a major preoccupation of Hanoi's inhabitants. The result is an interconnected water system, earning Hanoi the nickname 'Asian Venice'. The city's magnetism, position and communications have made it a coveted prize for potential invaders – but also difficult to hold on to. By making Hanoi the administrative capital of Indochina the French signalled their intention to stay.<sup>770</sup>

Accounts of Pnom Penh and Luang Prabang/Vientiane<sup>771</sup> (the capitals of Cambodia and Laos), the old imperial city of Hué, Touranne (France's first outpost in the territory), Dalat, Lang Son and other, smaller towns are rarer. One serviceman, quoted by Bodin, was struck by Tourane's impressive colonial villas and well constructed avenues. Another former soldier fondly recalled the nice lawns, old monuments and beautiful alleys of Hué. Several men were surprised that none of the towns had been destroyed by war,<sup>772</sup> an obvious contrast to their homeland.<sup>773</sup> A handful of French officers also visited the old temples at Angkor Vat, among them the later writer Jules Roy who remarked laconically: "The wars which had hit its walls [...] had not succeeded in destroying them. We, at least, we protected it. The Americans were not there yet. Neither was Pol Pot. Gigantic, it had rested for more than a thousand years but crumbled. Stones and faces had broken up under the bullets and shells from the mortars of rebel factions."<sup>774</sup> The awareness of monuments and local history extended to others. General François Gérin-Roze remarked in an interview: "This country marked me profoundly because [...] there was a rather ancient civilisation which was very respectable." The former lieutenant further hinted that the French comprehended the territory and its people better than their American successors who, in his words, "... understood nothing of the Vietnamese mentality."<sup>775</sup>

Seeming French protectionism and understanding were not just rhetoric. In a report titled 'battle of the dykes'<sup>776</sup> the authors highlighted the arduous work by engineers, soldiers and villagers of maintaining, repairing and guarding a network of 250 kilometres of dykes, which protected the north's rich rice paddies. The military press service, attempting to demonstrate peasants' rejection of the Viet Minh, stressed that the former offered to guard the dykes themselves. The text exposed the communists as the main culprits stating that: "... contrary to the solemn declarations of a hostile radio, it is the detachments charged with the repair of the dykes which from now on the rebels will attack with the greatest of persistence and perfidy. A few of ours are gravely, even mortally wounded, and French blood runs for the defence of the Tonkin's dykes."

<sup>770</sup> Nguyen Van Ky, 'Une cité-mémoire' in Boudarel and Nguyen Van Ky, *Hanoi 1936-1996*, 20-51.

<sup>771</sup> Vientiane was the administrative capital, Luang Prabang the seat of the royal family.

<sup>772</sup> Bodin, *Les combattants français face à la guerre d'Indochine*, 33-6.

<sup>773</sup> Between 1940 and 1945 more than 2,600,000 buildings and flats in France were destroyed or damaged. The same happened to roughly 10,000 bridges. Meanwhile, more than 20,000 kilometres of railway were dismantled or obliterated in bombing raids. See D. Veillon, *Vivre et survivre en France, 1939-1947* (1995), pp. 289-90.

<sup>774</sup> Roy, *Mémoires barbares*, 398-9.

<sup>775</sup> Interview, 21.6.1996, SHD/DITEEX, 3K 3 - II - (12AV 5).

<sup>776</sup> 'La bataille des digues au Tonkin, 1947-9', rapports, commandement supérieur des troupes françaises en Extrême-Orient, état-major, service de presse, 1947, SHD 10H 212.



More neutral testimonies hint at growing difficulties in the war and ongoing developmental deficiencies. A *TIME* reporter found an isolated post in the northern delta:

... decayed and rotting. The signs of siege and uselessness were everywhere: overgrown paths, cracked-mud earthworks and rusting barbed wire. The two-platoon Vietnamese garrisons had long been immobilized, their mission – protecting the countryside from Communists and collecting rice – a bitter joke. The Communists – barefoot guerrillas, not even regulars – had even burrowed deep into the outer fort defences.<sup>777</sup>

References to villages exist but not in abundance, partly because many communities had been emptied and sometimes burned down. This often owed to inhabitants' fear of being caught in the middle.<sup>778</sup> In other instances the Viet Minh recruited all young males while forcibly evacuating the rest of the population.<sup>779</sup> Those villages still inhabited were either located in French-controlled areas or left standing as small pockets of communist resistance. A mention of a 'safe' village features in the diaries of Commandant René Chauvin who led a *Division navale d'assaut (Dinassaut)*. He commented favourably on a place held by loyal militia: "The village of the militia is magnificently maintained. The children's friendliness and friendship is always touching. It's one of the nicest things I have seen since my arrival."<sup>780</sup> Other judgements are less joyful. General Le Chatelier was stationed near Hai Duong, where he and his men regularly penetrated the surrounding villages to mark presence even after the ceasefire. He described one village in a letter to his family thus:

... From time to time, a house of concrete, made of old stones, covered by a twisted roof with pointed angles [...] Here and there little dykes of red brick lined with bamboo, crossing the enclosing walls under veritable stone arches covered by creepers. In the centre, a church of European style made of a very clear stone and with a square tower [...] On the ground, in this climate, water everywhere [...] It smells when it is warm because it is the spillway for everything in the absence of sewers. [...] Chicken everywhere, but very small, of the barbaric sort; black and short pigs [...] ugly dogs [...] a few discrete buffalos [...] Kids with paddles, often meagre and dirty except for the very small ones, naked arses or covered by tiny, dirty shorts, more often by a shirt reaching down to the navel; meagre women under their Chinese hats, or with a turban of white linen as a sign of mourning or in a black rags; a filthy blouse open over a meagre and not very appetising chest [...] the teeth blackened from betel [...] Few men, apart sometimes from a grand-father with a goatee, generally one-eyed; or still the chef of the village or a priest with a colonial helmet on his head and dressed in white.<sup>781</sup>

One wonders how the famous French *mission civilisatrice* fits into such medieval scenes, where the church and the notable's helmet represented the only colonial influence. Unless the

<sup>777</sup> *TIME*, 7.6.1954.

<sup>778</sup> When Roger Delpy and his colleagues advanced on a road, nearby villagers fled and burned some of their rice stocks. See Delpy, *Soldats de la boue*, p. 129.

<sup>779</sup> On p. 76 of his novel *La 317<sup>e</sup> section* (first published in 1963), Pierre Schoendoerffer depicted how French soldiers entering a Laotian village found only children, women and elderly people. The young had been taken away by the advancing Viet Minh.

<sup>780</sup> Chauvin, *Carnets du Tonkin*, 40.

<sup>781</sup> SHD 1KT 442.

Viet Minh dragged the village's young men into its army, one can imagine that not a few voluntarily fled these rural surroundings – perhaps blaming the colonial power for not improving their lot.<sup>782</sup> Yet Delpey praised precisely that colonial record at the example of a southern town: “Tra Vinh is a small town perfectly illustrating the constructive French presence: schools, hospital, houses made of stone, public buildings, water and electricity services, etc.”<sup>783</sup> Other French, too, never tired of stressing the (in their view) comparatively high living standards in Indochina. A commission under Christian Pineau observed with horror Calcutta's dirtiness, poverty and high mortality during a stop-over.<sup>784</sup>

Apart from General Le Chatelier's quote, allusions to the health of non-Europeans do not abound. As in the case of their British counterparts, this could have had to do with soldiers' own state and incurring, medical troubles. The latter were meticulously recorded. A report describing the situation around Saigon-Cholon cites only 4 cases of battle wounds but 79 accidents. Malaria affected not more than 4 men but venereal diseases put 88 out of action. Three hundred and eight suffered from respiratory problems (excluding tuberculosis) and 587 from digestion-related issues. The report further lists 324 cases of eye and ear problems. Skin troubles bothered 393 soldiers. In contrast, only 2 cases of contagious diseases feature in the report while nobody fell victim to tuberculosis. Finally, neuro-psychiatric problems accounted for 55 cases.<sup>785</sup> Some of these problems were man-made. A report covering troops stationed outside Saigon noted that Long Thanh, where the families of officers and NCOs lived, was notorious for its lack of “fundamental rules of hygiene”.<sup>786</sup>

The widespread consumption of alcohol, drugs and sex prompted Jules Roy later to draw parallels to American GIs in the Vietnam War: “In our case, the commander-in-chief and certain officers smoked opium more out of pleasure than need. The rest of the troops got drunk on the big red from the quartermaster's store or on chewed coca leaves.”<sup>787</sup> *Commandant* Chauvin quoted a member of the *Dinassaut* who needed a Martini almost every hour.<sup>788</sup> Alcoholism became endemic especially in isolated posts.<sup>789</sup>

Food rations did little to improve soldiers' health. The men and women did not necessarily go hungry but eating rations were mediocre and monotone. When prices in Indochina rose in 1947 desserts, wine, meat, fresh vegetables and snacks disappeared from some garrisons and areas of operation. Cases of scurvy surfaced while food bought from local vendors and peasants

<sup>782</sup> In fairness it should be said that French will was not lacking but money was. After WWII the government set aside barely 10 billion francs (1948) for all overseas territories. Indochina itself possessed scant financial means and was in need of major reconstruction and development efforts. It was hoped that purchasing locally produced rice at a low price and exporting it at a higher one would provide the financial resources for future projects. But the latter depended on peace and stability. See P. Bernard, 'La mise en place du plan de modernisation de l'Indochine' in *Marchés coloniaux*, 12.6.1948, pp. 10-11, *La documentation française, France, Problèmes économiques, 1948*, LSE (R130).

<sup>783</sup> Delpey, *Soldats de la boue*, 104.

<sup>784</sup> *La voix du combattant*, January 1955, UNC. Pineau was a minister in various governments.

<sup>785</sup> 'Rapport médical mensuel', décembre 1951, commandement en chef en Indochine, forces terrestres, secteur sanitaire de Saigon-Cholon, Médecin-Chef Lieutenant-Colonel J. P. Leger, SHD 10H 1981.

<sup>786</sup> 'Rapport médical mensuel', corps de troupe, décembre 1951, commandement des troupes françaises en Indochine du sud (excl. Saigon-Cholon), direction du service de santé, Médecin-Colonel des TC Dumas, SHD 10H 1981.

<sup>787</sup> Roy, *Mémoires barbares*, 375.

<sup>788</sup> Chauvin, *Carnets du Tonkin*, 32.

<sup>789</sup> Bodin, *Les combattants français face à la guerre d'Indochine*, 100-2.

frequently led to dysentery. The devaluation of the piastre in 1953 further aggravated the problems. Small wonder observers noted that many soldiers looked like “hungry wolves”.

In the absence of shops, soldiers fished with explosives, hunted for cattle in the fields, bought rice from peasants or simply pillaged villages – a practice commonly referred to as ‘*opérations poulet*’.<sup>790</sup> The British Adrian Liddell Hart, Basil Liddell Hart’s son, witnessed such an operation during his service as a private in the Foreign Legion. Intended as a reconnaissance tour, it epitomised many of the inadequacies of the French war effort:

We arrived at a row of thatched wooden huts perched on stilts beside a large stream and a couple of crabs (small boats) were detailed to reconnoitre. One of them fired a burst of machine-gun fire which was answered only by the clucking of hens. [...] The Annamites quickly stole round the sides of the primitive dwellings. The first – second – third huts were deserted. [...] We began rounding up the squealing pigs and chickens. Here and there we shot huge sable cattle [...] The Annamites fired the thatch of huts and in a few moments they were all ablaze, as we waded back to the crabs with our loot – for some of the cavaliers had also grabbed mirrors and gallipots and other gewgaws. [...] I had been told to take back a small black pig which the Hungarian had captured while he went in search of another... [...] We indulged in the Indo-Chinese version of psychological warfare. Members of one or two crabs haphazardly chucked propaganda leaflets overboard. The leaflets showed a small chicken, presumably meant to represent the people of Viet-Nam, being swallowed by a large fierce snake which signified Viet-Minh or Red China. As we were the only people who were preying on chickens at the moment, the propaganda was not particularly apt.<sup>791</sup>

Soldiers’ comments on health and infrastructure were undoubtedly also coloured by experiences in France, which made the Indochinese experience look less dramatic than it does from a present perspective. Poverty, damaged infrastructure, poor hygiene and malnutrition were certainly not new to servicemen. In this context it is worth pointing out that the men fighting in Indochina did not grow up during the *trente glorieuses*<sup>792</sup> but the preceding two world wars and the Great Depression. While France’s population, profiting from new health services and family allowances, grew dramatically between 1946 and 1968, it had decreased in the previous twenty years. WWII alone reduced the population by almost 1.5 million, excluding the direct casualties of war. The survivors lived in a country that was still overwhelmingly agricultural and backward. Much of France was thinly populated and underdeveloped, contrasting with an ever-growing capital. The west and the *massif central* showed an up to 35% lower per capita income than the national average.<sup>793</sup> Roads, where they existed, were often poor. Such conditions drove thousands into small towns and on to the large cities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There, they laboured under dangerous conditions, joined by disenfranchised immigrants.<sup>794</sup>

<sup>790</sup> Carles, *Des millions des soldats inconnus*, 163-4 and Bodin, *Les combattants français face à la guerre d’Indochine*, 76-81.

<sup>791</sup> A. Liddell Hart, *Strange Company* (1953), pp. 136-8.

<sup>792</sup> ‘Thirty glorious (years)’ from 1945 to 1975.

<sup>793</sup> H. D. Clout, *The Geography of Post-war France: A Social and Economic Approach* (1972), pp. 2-5, 26-8 and 111.

<sup>794</sup> J. Forbes, N. Hewlett, F. Nectoux, *Contemporary France: Essays and Texts on Politics, Economics and Society* (2001), pp. 167-9, 249-259 and 300-1.

WWII, particularly captivity and occupation, left especially deep scars. 1,800,000 French soldiers were captured by the Germans in the summer of 1940. Apart from 200,000, who escaped before being taken to Germany, and others who were released early, a large proportion spent the entire war in *Oflags*, *Stalags* and *Kommandos*. Life there was particularly harsh during the first winter due to lack of basic sanitary installations and overcrowding, as well as insufficient cloth and food rations. While conditions improved over time those selected to do industrial work still endured severe circumstances, including eventual allied bombing raids. Others, helping out in agriculture and forestry, enjoyed more freedom but risked accidents and brutal treatment by their employers. (It should be added that captured NCOs and officers were not forced to work.) Overall, 30,000 detained French never returned to France.

Furthermore, 66,000 Jews (90% being foreign) and 63,000 (other) French, mostly implicated in the resistance, were deported to concentration camps where 95% of the former and 40% of the latter perished. Collaborating authorities also targeted gypsies, freemasons, communists, as well as German and Spanish refugees.

In addition, 650,000 young men of military age were forced to labour in Germany for the *Service du travail obligatoire*. Sixty thousand caught tuberculosis of which 35,000 died. Challenging circumstances, including abuse, also forced many young girls to volunteer for work in Germany. For numerous men (and women) staying behind, hard and dangerous times in the *maquis* of the Savoie and Corrèze or work in unhygienic and unsafe French factories beckoned. Meanwhile, the rationing imposed by the Vichy government failed to meet families' requirements by roughly 1,000 calories a day. A black market quickly developed.<sup>795</sup>

Even after liberation the overall situation did not improve until 1949. Until then, transport routes remained either destroyed or largely reserved for the continuing war effort. Badly coordinated production and hesitant farmers led to acute shortages of milk, fat and meat. By 1945 65% of the non-farming population could only satisfy 50-70% of its vital needs. Bordeaux's inhabitants officially suffered famine. Children, adolescents (some of them future servicemen), pregnant women, workers and elderly people were worst off. Premature death and diseases had already spread during the war but by 1945 child mortality stood at 110%. All the while families continued to repair old clothes and shoes for lack of money. Inflation soared while people's purchasing power remained low.<sup>796</sup>

### Climate, vegetation and wildlife

If one examines travel images of the Bay of Ha Long (Along),<sup>797</sup> the temples at Angkor Vat or parts of the Mekong<sup>798</sup> one easily understands why many French servicemen fell in love with

<sup>795</sup> Both paragraphs based on R. Vinen, *France, 1934-1970* (1996), pp. 57-68 and *The Unfree French: Life Under the Occupation* (2006), pp. 183-213 and 367-376.

<sup>796</sup> Veillon, *Vivre et survivre en France*, 289-316.

<sup>797</sup> E. Brisbois, G. Rovillé, Vo Thi Cam Nhung, *Vietnam, Cambodge, Laos* (1993), pp. 161-8 and photography section between pages 320 and 321.

<sup>798</sup> J. Népote, *Indochine: Laos, Cambodge, Vietnam* (1993), photography section between pages 198 and 201

Indochina's countryside and have engaged in melancholic contemplation. But gazing at war images of that same landscape<sup>799</sup> – much more variable than that of Malaya – one also appreciates the inherent challenges and dangers. On his return roughly forty years later General Bigeard mused in regard to the north-western highlands: "A spectacle still as magnificent, a dotting of hills, of mountains.... And this forest so majestic, so impressive, and nevertheless so ungrateful. I loved this country."<sup>800</sup> Commandant Paul Léger for his part was in awe of the coral belts surrounding an island near Touranne, which he was in charge of.<sup>801</sup> Robert Bidon on the other hand highlighted how the at times dense forests could completely demoralise units. In his memoirs he recalled a group of soldiers stumbling out of the jungle:

The operation, started several days ago, spits out of the jungle an exhausted unit, which those who arrive for the relief observe with uneasiness. Auguste Bouin [synonym for Bidot] dazedly watches 'those' who come out of the jungle. Dreary looks, stiff lips, scratched faces, bodies and arms, bitten by leeches, mosquitoes [...] and ants, cut by giant plants with thousands of soaring branches, interwoven, inextricable human traps and veritable octopi. The colour of the combat uniforms is that of mud, mould, sweat... blood too... the urine of fear and sudden surprises. The bodies are feverish, harassed at the brink of exhaustion. A lieutenant of 'those' who escape this hell, approaches Granert. 'We wish you much joy, friends... what a mess!'<sup>802</sup>

Likewise, heat, cold, humidity,<sup>803</sup> torrential rain, insects, leeches and reptiles could dampen enthusiasm. Commandant Chauvin complained about the sometimes ghastly conditions in the Tonkin delta. Staying in Haiphong on one occasion he jotted down the following comment: "I had spent the day soaked in my sweat. What a dirty country!" One day later he noted: "In France it's spring... here it's complete shit!" And after a further few months he added: "Sunday. Dark Sunday. It rains like a shower. It smells like destruction and the end."<sup>804</sup> Liddell Hart, too, felt somewhat ambivalent upon arriving in South Vietnam:

At Cap Saint Jacques I saw for the first time the country in which I had come to fight. Here at this south-eastern point of Asia the dark green foreland, thickly carpeted with jungle growth, rose steeply towards the overcast sky. [...] Dark bushes and dens scrub stretched to the muddy banks, spilling into oozy shallows. [...] Soon it began to rain. Land and river and sky became one element.

The former legionnaire also recalled searching for and ridding his body of innumerable leeches populating the swamps he patrolled. The sight of snakes and various mosquito bites did little to appease his mind.<sup>805</sup>

<sup>799</sup> Hédouy, *La guerre d'Indochine*, 24, 25, 27 and 47.

<sup>800</sup> Bigeard, *Ma guerre d'Indochine*.

<sup>801</sup> Interview, 18.8.1998, SHD/DITEEX 3K 42 - V - (12AV 271).

<sup>802</sup> SHD 1KT 330.

<sup>803</sup> Claude Corniquet and his colleagues were astonished by the humidity, fog and freshness they encountered on the Annamese coast. Surprise turned into frustration when they spent the night in tropical rain. See <http://ccorniquet.100webspaces.net>.

<sup>804</sup> Chauvin, *Carnets du Tonkin*, 44 and 101.

<sup>805</sup> Liddell Hart, *Strange Company*, 134 and 140. (Quote on p. 110).

Given their importance for transport, waterways emerge fairly frequently in testimonies. Roger Delpey and his colleagues for instance moved up the Mekong in Chinese-style junks. The river appeared surprisingly large and disappointingly dirty to the author, who was evidently unfamiliar with the sight.<sup>806</sup> Ginette Dupont-Subirada realised that further north the same Mekong "... was not a long, calm river and frequently carried corpses."<sup>807</sup> Raymond Lescastreys for his part described the famous *Plaine des Joncs* as a "vast, insalubrious, half-flooded zone that extends west of Saigon to the edge of the Cambodian border over several kilometres where only junks sail. Hence it's name." The lieutenant noticed that some of the artificial channels still bore the names of early French engineers.<sup>808</sup>

Accounts of Indochina's wildlife are more difficult to come by, implying that soldiers rarely encountered any spectacular species.<sup>809</sup> This could have been a reflection of the dense human population (at least in the deltas) pushing animals to the fringes.<sup>810</sup> At the same time it suggests that much of the war was played out in cultivated and populated areas.<sup>811</sup>

Importantly in the context of this project, one searches in vain for references to the many Frenchmen, who had explored Indochina's wild environment in earlier times. None of the texts and interviews used for this project has featured references to the books of Pierre Loti, André Malraux or Marshal Lyautey.

From impressions of the environment let us now move on to viewpoints on Indochina's inhabitants:

### Local communities

Depictions of Indochina's population and interactions with the latter are more frequent in French testimonies than British recollections of Malayan communities. This could well have to do with the fact that the French relied to a greater extent on local troops.

The selection of the different communities analysed here is based on the frequency of references. Various groups, such as the Chinese, Japanese and South Asians<sup>812</sup> have not been

<sup>806</sup> Delpey, *Soldats de la boue*, 100.

<sup>807</sup> [www.anac-fr.com/f\\_2gm.htm](http://www.anac-fr.com/f_2gm.htm).

<sup>808</sup> [www.duhamel.bz/indochine/1952.htm](http://www.duhamel.bz/indochine/1952.htm).

<sup>809</sup> Bodin, *Les soldats français face à la guerre d'Indochine*, 39.

<sup>810</sup> This in turn might explain why a tiger would attack a boy on an Annamese plateau. Claude Corniquet accompanied a group of villagers to collect the remnants. See <http://ccorniquet.100webpace.net>.

<sup>811</sup> This was only logical. Rice was Indochina's main (export) product and has predominantly been produced in the Tonkin and Mekong deltas. Particularly the Viet Minh depended on rice rations. See *The Economist*, 8.5.1954.

<sup>812</sup> The lack of reference to all three ethnicities is intriguing in that they assumed important roles in Indochina, despite their limited numbers. The Chinese dominated various sectors of the economy. They were categorised by the French expatriate community as venal, secretive, filthy, chaotic, potentially criminal and profit-hungry. The case was similar with the Jetty, who originated from India's port-cities and France's old territories, such as Pondicherry. Often adhering to the *civaïte* sect many were French citizens, which allowed for freedom not enjoyed by other Asian groups. But their prominence in the usury trade coupled with their often exorbitant interest rates made them objects of hate. In contrast and prior to WWII, the Japanese were treated as assimilated Europeans based on treaties signed in 1896 and 1907. The image of hyper-sensual individuals largely owed to the numerous prostitutes – lumped together as the famous geishas. See M. G. Vann, 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly. Variation and Difference in French Racism in colonial *Indochine*', in S. Peabody and T. Stovall (eds.), *The Colour of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (2003), pp. 193-9.

included because veterans have mentioned them only fleetingly, if at all. The same goes for Buddhist monks despite their involvement in the conflict.<sup>813</sup>

Of all ethnic groups soldiers encountered they formed the strongest bonds with minorities. Representatives of those lesser developed communities rallied to France fairly eagerly due to their historic aversions to the Viet<sup>814</sup> majority, which constituted the bulk of the anti-colonial guerrillas. The prominence of highland minorities in the sources has probably also been due to the fact that they proved to be more efficient fighters than affiliates of the national armies.

In many cases, particularly in North Vietnam, ethnic divisions have coincided with those between town and countryside, fertile plains and remote uplands, coast and interior. The Viet majority have habitually dominated the larger population centres (together with pockets of Chinese), the deltas and the coastline. The higher altitudes, remote valleys, forests and islands have largely hosted other ethnicities. This also reflects population movements over the centuries whereby the dominant and further developed Viet gradually squeezed out smaller and more primitive groups, some of which arrived later. As a result of this setup, Massu's men faced a hostile reception in Phu Lang Tuong upon its occupation in 1947 but were welcomed in the countryside.<sup>815</sup>

Minorities of any colour made up 14% in Vietnam during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at least 40% in Laos but only a tiny percentage in Cambodia. Those in the north often feature(d) long, richly ornamented dresses and particular hair styles. Garbs tend(ed) to be simpler among southern ethnicities, leading to the term 'Moi' (savages). In the north-east the Thai have dominated. Along the upper Mekong down to the border with Cambodia the Lao have represented the principal ethnicity. The Khmer have prevailed in Cambodia, marginalising the Cham. 'Proto-Indochinese' peoples have populated much of Laos and Annam while Meo have been scattered along the Chinese and Vietnamese-Laotian borders.<sup>816</sup>

Since much of the war took place in Vietnam it is worth taking a closer look at its ethnic composition. One of the few books available on this subject has been written by three regional authors. To the extent that French veterans have emphasised the distinctiveness of minorities those three writers have stressed parallels. Even so, they have quoted official lists and statistics, which put the number of ethnic groups at 54 at the turn of the millenium. Of these the Viet (or Kinh) make up 87%. Others, like the Thai, Muong, Hoa and Khmer total about one million each. Others amount to no more than a few hundred. Admitting that the official categorisation and figures require an update, the authors have nevertheless grouped the communities in three major language categories: an Austro-Asiatic, an Austronesian and a Sino-Tibetan family.

Population streams, resulting from Chinese persecution, Siamese invasions, famine, epidemics and revolts, have led to a situation where almost all Southeast Asian language families

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<sup>813</sup> One representative pointed out in Rousselier's documentary that his fellow disciples would not only shelter guerrillas but also join in the war effort.

<sup>814</sup> See explanations of ethnic definitions later on.

<sup>815</sup> Massu, *Sept ans avec Leclerc*, 285.

<sup>816</sup> H. Tertrais, *Atlas des guerres d'Indochine, 1940-1990: de l'Indochine française à l'ouverture internationale* (2004), p. 7.

are represented. At the same time, a considerable mixing has occurred so that bi- and multi-lingual tendencies are widespread, as are traditions like matrilineal family structures.<sup>817</sup>

Group names can be confusing. The same communities have often been labelled differently or distinct ones have been lumped together. The term 'Moi' for instance has served as a summary definition for a number of ethnicities, some of which French veterans are likely to have confused. The following passages thus echo soldiers' categorisations, even if these might have been based on wrong assumptions.

In general, (former) French soldiers have been acutely aware of cultural differences between Europeans and Asians, as well as of the latter's unfathomable nature. General Massu for instance reflected: "The mentality of the yellow, so difficult to define by a white, certainly if he has never lived before in the Far East, adds to my difficulty in understanding." He admitted jumping to conclusions when judging the caution and ambiguity he detected among locals: "... our western nature is perhaps too quick to call it hypocrisy". But an evening with communist officers during the temporary ceasefire in 1946 still led him to conclude: "... in this country Penelope would have been queen."<sup>818</sup> Similarly, Raymond Lescastreys remembered spotting a peasant observing the passing troops with a smile that was "enigmatic and impenetrable, so particular to Asians."<sup>819</sup> But as touched on before, such seemingly Asian attitudes and behaviour were not necessarily embedded in conventions. They owed much to the fact that the Viet Minh had to make up for technical inferiority with secrecy. The wider population for its part found itself caught between feuding factions.

With this in mind, we shall proceed to recollections of specific groups starting with the majority:

#### a) Viet

Before going into soldiers' impressions of this group its terminology needs to be clarified. Up to this point, the western term 'Vietnamese' has been applied to the group, which technically includes all ethnicities. In view of an earlier Annamese empire, many (former) French servicemen have employed the idiom 'Annamites' instead. It is not entirely correct either stemming from the derogatory, Chinese term 'pacified south'. The modern reference book used in this section employs the term 'Viet', which shall be respected in the following paragraphs. If the more general term resurfaces later on in the text, it owes to the difficulty of judging the true ethnicity of the people referred to. Vice versa, it is impossible to state in all certainty that the protagonists described below were ethnic Viet. But their geographical location offers some clues.

Soldierly views have tended to be less racist than those of civilian expatriates, not least because their lives depended on amicable relations, where possible. Both groups encountered the main ethnic group in the person of the mandarin, the *boy(esse)*, the *con gai* (mistress) and the *nha que* (peasant). Among French settlers the first carried the stigmas of being vain, mischievous, brutal, corrupt and decadent. 'Boys' were deemed perfidious, dumb, indiscreet but

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<sup>817</sup> Dang Nghiem Van, Chu Thai Son and Luu Hung, *Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam* (2000), pp. V-VIII and 1-7.  
<sup>818</sup> Massu, *Sept ans avec Leclerc*, 276, 281 and 283.  
<sup>819</sup> [www.duhamel.bz/indochine/1952.htm](http://www.duhamel.bz/indochine/1952.htm).



keen to please. *Con gai* for their part were reputed to be amenable but detached. The supposedly virtuous, wise and stoic but childlike and superstitious peasant has also echoed in military recollections. The same goes for the perception of the Viet in general as inept businessmen but obsessive gamblers.<sup>820</sup>

As in Malaya, military relations with the local majority suffered from wartime pressures.<sup>821</sup> Ordinary Viet might not always have felt much sympathy towards the dogmatic and demanding communists. But they were not necessarily more sympathetic towards the French.<sup>822</sup> When it came to concrete actions, they frequently remained neutral or simply accommodated both sides. De Bollardi re suspected at the time that the same people helped de-mine roads, who had probably implanted the deadly explosives in the first place. He also noticed that relations with communities worsened the more the guerrillas infiltrated contested areas.<sup>823</sup>

In light of this the modest French attempts to win hearts and minds had had little effect on a population essentially wishing to be left alone and struggling for survival after WWII. The last thing peasants, craftsmen and shopkeepers needed was another lengthy conflict.<sup>824</sup> A *Paris Match* correspondent for example encountered a (probably) Viet peasant whose family had become the target of the Japanese, the Viet Minh and the French within only a few months. As a result, he had lost two sons to the communists while the last one served in a pro-French militia. Graham Greene wrote in the same weekly that a courageous CEFEO fought well but lacked the backing of a largely antagonistic population. It also had to rely on a negligent and corrupt regime. Even those who faced possible communist retributions, such as a priest in Phat Diem, did not welcome the French.<sup>825</sup> This should have come as little surprise as loyalty to the colonial power could have disastrous consequences. Catholics,<sup>826</sup> notables and minorities bore the brunt of Viet Minh retaliations and fled rather than awaiting the communist arrival.<sup>827</sup> A *TIME* reporter, who witnessed the French withdrawal from Nam Dinh and Phat Diem, compared the frantic scenes with similar ones he had observed in China and Korea. What for the French constituted a tactical retreat meant in effect abandoning 1,600 square miles and 570,000 Catholics within three days. Only 11,000 managed to follow the French, usually after bribing officials. A few young Catholic teenagers armed themselves with grenades to wage guerrilla war on the advancing Viet Minh.<sup>828</sup>

<sup>820</sup> Vann in Peabody & Stovall, *The Colour of Liberty*, 188-93.

<sup>821</sup> Like many of his colleagues Raymond Lescastre res knew that civilians aided the Viet Minh "out of fear or affinity". See [www.duhamel.bz/indochine/1953.htm](http://www.duhamel.bz/indochine/1953.htm).

<sup>822</sup> Catholics especially desired autonomy, which they were accorded in the form of two provinces in the north. Bishops and priests like Mgr. Le Hun Thu, who was responsible for the province of Phat Diem, ruled their territories like kingdoms. The former set up his own justice and finance system as well as a private army. His disciples only fought with the French if he gave them his blessing. To increase their powers and survive, many priests and bishops collaborated both with the Viet Minh and the French. See Delpard, *Les rizi res de la souffrance*, 77-9.

<sup>823</sup> De Bollardi re, *Bataille d'Alger, bataille d'homme*, 53 and 59.

<sup>824</sup> Deputy Andr  Bidet observed during a visit to Vietnam that ordinary people did not understand why the war, deemed fraternal, continued. He sensed a wide-spread wish for negotiations and peace. See: *D bats Union Fran aise*, 11.3.1954, LSE 44 (R26) AUF1.

<sup>825</sup> *Paris Match*, no. 84, 28.10.1950 and no. 173, 5.-12.1952.

<sup>826</sup> For a detailed analysis of the situation Catholics found themselves in see: C. Tran Thi Lien, *Les Catholiques vietnamiens pendant la guerre d'Indochine* (2002).

<sup>827</sup> That said, *the Economist's* correspondent claimed early in the war that many Catholics hesitated to break with the Viet Minh. See issue from 12.11.1949.

<sup>828</sup> *TIME*, 12.7.1954.

Despite their possible loyalty to the communists or unwillingness to commit to the French cause, the Viet impressed many servicemen through their hard-work and modesty. Hélié de Saint Marc asked for instance: "Has one ever known a farmer who had a more intimate contact with the land than that of Vietnam?" In his admiration the young officer "...sought the contact with the Vietnamese who fascinated me [...] I loved their grace, their courage and their analytical sense. I sensed the richness of these thousand year old civilisations of Asia, of which every farmer, without knowing it, carried a piece."<sup>829</sup> The statement undoubtedly betrays a generalised romanticism towards the Viet. But, having commanded men from highland communities, de Saint Marc was in a fairly good position to distinguish between the ethnic majority and minorities.

In contrast, especially officers and NCOs, who trained members of Vietnam's nationalist army, regarded few of their recruits as reliable. General Le Chatelier maintained in his diaries that he ultimately gave up on the Viet(name) believing that they would "join the Viet Minh tomorrow" if left unattended.<sup>830</sup> Fellow veteran, General Hugo Geoffrey, recalled that many had simply appeared to make sure they had been on the winning side.<sup>831</sup> New trainees, habitually recruited by 'little mandarins',<sup>832</sup> followed financial incentives or represented natural enemies of the Viet Minh by religion, class or profession. Among them were men (and women) who had lost family members at communist hands. Colonel Jacques Britsch recognised the pressures bearing on individuals upon encountering the daughter of a notable in the region of Yen Bay. Her father had been tried and condemned to death by a 'peoples' tribunal' for fighting the Viet Minh in 1946. Following his execution, his wife had committed suicide while their sons had been enlisted as coolies or guerrillas.<sup>833</sup>

To the annoyance of men like General Navarre, nationalist Viet(name) never demonstrated the fervour necessary for a supposedly independent nation-state. Too many young, bourgeois men evaded conscription through payments while the government failed to impede the clandestine aid to the Viet Minh. Furthermore, southern Viet(name), suspicious of their northern counterparts, were not overly concerned about a potential division between north and south.<sup>834</sup> Encounters between the French military and Vietnam's elite did little to dispel doubts. The empress (Bao Dai's mother) informed General Salan that the Viet Minh instilled fear in Hué. It also appeared to her that the French were "fighting a phantom". Yet she could not lend the general active support because her family enjoyed very little itself.<sup>835</sup> For a reason. Deputy André Bidet regarded it as "unhelpful" that her son went hunting instead of marking presence among troops and the population.<sup>836</sup> Commandant Paul Léger felt that Bao Dai had generally been ill-suited to lead Vietnam with focus and energy.<sup>837</sup> Colonel Jacques Britsch for his part even heard rumours of republican moves to oust Bao Dai as early as 1953.<sup>838</sup> One could counter such assessments

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<sup>829</sup> De Saint Marc, *Mémoires*, 33 and 103.

<sup>830</sup> SHD 1KT 442.

<sup>831</sup> Interview, 14.5.1998, SHD/DITEEX, 3K 37 - III - (12AV 249).

<sup>832</sup> Village headmen or otherwise influential, bourgeois personalities.

<sup>833</sup> SHD 1K 705.

<sup>834</sup> Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, 130, 140 and 302.

<sup>835</sup> Salan, *Mémoires*, 301.

<sup>836</sup> *Débats, Union Française*, 11.3.1954, LSE 44 (R26) AUF1.

<sup>837</sup> Interview, 13.8.1998, SHD/DITEEX, 3K 42 -VI- (12AV 272).

<sup>838</sup> SHD 1K 705.

by pointing out that the French themselves had earlier weakened the monarchy by robbing it of any real power.<sup>839</sup> Mindful of these moves, Bao Dai later portrayed himself as a sharp, far-sighted and subtle negotiator standing up to scheming high-commissioners, ill-informed presidents, squabbling parties and a hostile French press for the future good of 'his' people.<sup>840</sup>

In their defence, many of his subjects demonstrated administrative skills, loyalty and combative fervour. Nationalist soldiers for example volunteered to be parachuted into Dien Bien Phu during the fortress' last days.<sup>841</sup> Genviève de Galard recalled how Viet(name)se paratroopers had sung the *Marseillaise* in its trenches for want of their own national song.<sup>842</sup> And a proud Viet battalion commander explained to a *TIME* reporter that his men had jumped into the water to hunt down and kill guerrillas.<sup>843</sup> Some examples also show that men and women, not necessarily communist-leaning but keen on ending French domination, drifted towards the Viet Minh to achieve their goals. It is testament to a strong nationalist undercurrent often underestimated and denied by many French. Jacques Raphaël-Leygues quoted in the parliament of the French Union the example of his friend, the Professor Bun Hoi. The latter, a descendant of the royal family, was a well-respected leprosy and cancer specialist. He had originally participated in negotiations at Fontainebleau as a member of the Viet Minh delegation but later sided with the French.<sup>844</sup> Another interesting example is Hoang Xuan Binh. In 1945 the latter served as aide-de-camp to Bao Dai until the latter (temporarily) abdicated. He then became an advisor to Ho Chin Minh before joining a combat group. In January 1947 he was arrested in a governmental ambush, imprisoned and interrogated by a French officer. While stressing his admiration for France, the young man cited disgust of French colonialism and the corrupt Vietnamese government as main reasons for his involvement with the Viet Minh.<sup>845</sup>

## b) Sects

The sects' central role in southern Vietnam and the Indochina War makes it expedient to highlight them. However, only the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao can really be considered spiritual while the Binh Xuen resembled more Chinese triads. The writer Jean Lartéguy has probably best described the nature of these groups, their origins and regional context:

Here lived the people who combined the taste of the supernatural and profit, the love of their large rice fields [...] the fear of living alone, an instinctive defiance of all forms of authority, the confusion of ideas and sentiments, a primitive xenophobia which manifested itself against the white man and all those, Vietnamese or Chinese who [...] wore a uniform or claimed to represent a far-away power for incomprehensible justifications. From these beliefs, these fears, these

<sup>839</sup> *The Economist*, 11.2.1950.

<sup>840</sup> Bao Dai, *Le Dragon d'Annam* (1979), pp. 187-97.

<sup>841</sup> J. Dalloz, 'Des combattants indochinois contre le Vietminh' in *Les collections de l'histoire*, no. 23, 50-1.

<sup>842</sup> De Galard, *Une femme à Dien Bien Phu*, 114.

<sup>843</sup> *TIME*, 7.6.1954.

<sup>844</sup> *Débats, Union Française*, 11.3.1954, LSE 44 (R26) AUF1.

<sup>845</sup> Général L. Fallon, 'Un rebelle' in *Revue historique des armées*, no. 4 (1989), 27-3.

superstitions, from the necessity for the individuals, who had lost their traditional structures of regrouping in troubled times, the sects were born. [...] they would control several million people in the valuable South Vietnam [...] The South Vietnamese or Cochinchinese were physically, morally, intellectually different from the man of the centre and even more from that of the north, the hard and robust Tonkinese. He was born from a mixture of races and cultures: Chams pushed away from the Annamese coasts, Khmer, ancient inhabitants of the land, Malays, and also Chinese who had refused the regime of the foreign invaders. To this would be added an Annamese mixture of vagabonds, political exiles, deserters and adventurers...<sup>846</sup>

Despite early French crackdowns, wartime collaboration with the Japanese and, initially, the Viet Minh, all three sects were provided with French weapons, money, advisors, honours and presents during the Indochina War. Even so, questions were raised in administrative circles. Jacques Raphaël-Leygues wondered in his (published) diaries if the Hoa Hao were worthy allies after a Viet friend had stressed the cultural difference between the sects and the French.<sup>847</sup> The Cao Dai, Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen grew so powerful that the French felt compelled to set up a counter-movement – the *Unités mobiles pour la défense des chrétientés* (UMDC) under the Eurasian Colonel Leroy.

The sect most often quoted has been the Cao Dai. Its founder was a minor Viet(name)se bureaucrat named Ngo Van Chieu. The latter became convinced that he had witnessed the presence of the Supreme Being (Cao Dai) who charged him with the task of spreading a new and universal religion. Ngo Van Chieu's growing following included many other minor bureaucrats. During a large celebration in 1926 the movement made an official entrance into Cochinchina's political and cultural life. Its leaders declared that Cao Dai relied on a pyramid of saints, which included Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, Sun Yat Sen, Victor Hugo and the Vietnamese Nostradamus Trang Trinh. The adherents of the new religion believed in reincarnation, the posthumous consequences of human actions, Karma and the arrival of an enlightened king who would re-establish the lost golden age. Similar to the Catholic Church the Cao Dai featured cardinals, arch(bishops), priests and a parallel hierarchy for women. Its centre was a magnificent temple/cathedral in the province of Tay Ninh, which turned into a nationalist centre. One of Ngo Van Chieu's close associates and successors aimed to restore the old empire of Annam, topple Emperor Bao Dai and replace him with Prince Cong De. He also set up a secret society, which would later be suspected of assassinating, among others, French servicemen. Despite such activities the Cao Dai counted several hundred thousand followers by 1945. In an article – aptly titled "Is Cao Dai a religion?" – Georges Anthony nevertheless explained that the movement was characterised by internal divisions, defections and corruption.<sup>848</sup>

Hoa Hao surpassed Cao Dai by amassing up to 800,000 followers and controlling much of western Cochinchina. Its founder, Huynh Phu So, grew up in a farming village whose name the sect would bear. After being cured from languidness he began to preach Buddhism, declaring himself the new Phat. Huynh Phu So attracted people from the surrounding villages who longed

<sup>846</sup> J. Lartéguy, *Soldats perdus et fous de dieu: Indochine 1945-1955* (1986), p. 34.

<sup>847</sup> Raphaël-Leygues, *Ponts de lianes*, 59-60.

<sup>848</sup> *Chroniques d'outre-mer*, no. 8, August-December 1951.

for a simple and cheap religion. Followers of Hoa Hao were required to respect Buddhist laws, to be honest and charitable, as well as to bow in the direction of four cardinal points. They were also expected to defend the country against foreign invaders. Keeping their hair long and wearing sombre clothes they abstained from opium, drinking and gambling.

The name of Binh Xuen derived from a cluster of villages south of Cholon, home to small gangs. From this shadowy environment emerged a certain Le Van Vien, son of a Sino-Vietnamese gangster boss and the daughter of a local councillor. He was eventually initiated into the Binh Xuen whose laws he vowed to respect: to stay loyal to the group, to keep his word, never to touch other members' wives, concubines and sisters, never to offer any information to the police, to demonstrate courage and to obey his bosses. Like other members he also had himself tattooed. And similarly to his eventual friend, Bao Dai, Le Van Vien discovered the joy of gambling, money and women while becoming involved in the racketeering and protection business. His activities landed him in prison in 1927, followed by twelve years of forced labour. After several failed attempts he escaped in 1940. But Le Van Vien's hesitation to collaborate with the Kempeitai left him without protection and resulted in another prison spell, during which he encountered political inmates. These connections were to serve him well upon his release and rise to Binh Xuen's leadership.

After WWII the Corsican *Commandant* Savani, head of the 2<sup>me</sup> bureau in South Vietnam, was handed the task of establishing relations with the sects. Being married to a Vietnamese and speaking her tongue contributed to his understanding of the sect phenomenon.<sup>849</sup> In the course of his collaboration he came to the following conclusion:

How does one explain the success of the sects if not by the immense faithfulness of the masses, still impregnated by Taoism and its spiritual practices, of witchcraft and magic [...] Almost always founded for a religious or mystical reason by an enlightened one, a half-crazy or an adventurer, these sects quickly offer opportunities to those guided by a political interest to turn them away from their initial aim in order to put it at the disposal of a cause which such a fanatic support reinforces considerably...<sup>850</sup>

Other references to sects stem from an intriguing private collection by *Commandant* (and later Colonel) Henri Esquilat, who liaised with the Cao Dai militia. The author included a detailed (but un-authored and undated) report explaining the origins, practices and spread of the Cao Dai cult, personal letters and photographs. The rapport appears relatively naïve and complacent but largely aligns itself with Lartéguy's descriptions. It is accompanied by a short document signed by a Captain Tran Van Trang in September 1948, who identified himself as Cao Dai commander in the Can Tho area. It features the three insignias worn by the movement's troops, i.e. a fan composed of 36 swan feathers (standing for the ability to extinguish the fire of passion), a purifying brush (to cleanse the soul) and the sword of renovation (symbolising the good). Esquilat further enclosed two letters from what appear to have been Cao Dai officers. One of them, Trang Quang

<sup>849</sup> Dalloz, *Dictionnaire de la guerre d'Indochine*, 228.

<sup>850</sup> Content on sects based on Lartéguy, *Soldats perdus et fous de dieu*, 33-68. (above quote on p. 11).

Vinh reported to him about the progress of his forces. According to the author, Cao Dai troops had extended their zone of action, thereby littering much of Cochinchina with auto-defence posts. They had also raised the number of forces and engaged the Viet Minh in frequent skirmishes. The writer claimed that (contrary to most of the CEFEO) they were harassing their enemy particularly during the night. Esquilat's former Vietnamese 'student' rued the departure of his 'mentor' but praised the commitment of the latter's successor. He also assured the former of their allegiance to Emperor Bao Dai and expressed his sincere desire for peace and eventual independence.

The photographs attest to the Asian and European influences of the movement, as well as to its rather chequered historic record from a French point of view. One of them is showing proud Cao Dai officers (one of them being the author of the letter) wearing French uniforms. Another image features a second group of officers, who are all wearing hats similar to those used by the Japanese in WWII. The commander is even holding a Samurai sword. Further prints present units with British and Japanese helmets standing to attention or exercising in the forest. Several other photographs, probably taken by Esquilat himself or his staff, feature a beautiful temple, dignitary women resembling nuns, as well as a banquet with high-ranking French officers. The latter's presence underlies the sect's importance to the French.<sup>851</sup>

### *c) Inhabitants of Cambodia and Laos:*

Given that the main battles of the war were fought in Vietnam, the people of Laos and Cambodia have figured comparatively less prominently in recollections. Yet the two territories held strategic and political importance. If the Viet Minh had been permitted to infiltrate Laos and Cambodia in strength (which they attempted in the case of the former) France's standing would have been further shattered. Dien Bien Phu's purpose consisted not least in preventing the invasion of Laos.<sup>852</sup> Nevertheless, Laos and north-eastern Cambodia especially served as supply arteries for the Viet Minh, thanks to the assistance of more or less allied communist movements. General Guillot remembered how, as a young captain, he and his troops attempted to intercept the '*ligne des trams*', which would turn into the 'Ho Chi Minh trail' during the (second) Vietnam War.<sup>853</sup>

In the early 1960s Laos' population density stood at merely six people per km<sup>2</sup>. The Lao and Thai have constituted the largest proportion, living mostly along the Mekong. The northern mountains have been home to the Miao, Yao and Hmong (Meo) as well as to Sino-Tibetan groups. The south has been the realm of the Kha. As in the case of Cambodia though, ethnicities have frequently been lumped together in the few soldierly testimonies.

For much of the Indochina War, and even beyond, Laos was split between the royalist government, neutrals and the communist-leaning Pathet Lao, situated in the north-east. The division was as much political as family-based: Prince Souvanna Phouma headed the government

<sup>851</sup> Private collection, SHD 1K 638.

<sup>852</sup> In the eyes of General Navarre the garrison succeeded in doing that, despite the final defeat. See Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, 257.

<sup>853</sup> Rousselier, *Vietnam – la première guerre*.

while his half-brother, the 'Red Prince' Souphanouvong, directed the communist opposition.<sup>854</sup> Among those reflecting on Laos figured General Navarre who, focused on the royal family:

The Laotians always manifested a great, good willingness for collaboration. Among the political men a few would have been rather tempted to play a double game between us and the Viet Minh but the influence of the royal family kept them on the right path. The old king Sisavong Vong was loved and respected by his people whose estimation he won by his courageous attitude when, in April 1953, Luang Prapang had been directly threatened. His son, the hereditary Prince [...], although firmly defending the principle of independence of his country, was too intelligent and fine not to comprehend that Laos was far from having achieved the degree of desired evolution to act, in practice, like an independent state. [...] It was certainly thanks to him that the Laotian effort was more sincere and, proportional to the resources of the country, more important than that of the other states. Unfortunately, the means of Laos were the most feeble ones and their limit quickly reached.<sup>855</sup>

One can easily spot a certain paternalism in the quote above. Politicians trying to gain room for manoeuvre and distancing themselves from the French were accused of playing a double game. The king and his son, on the other hand, were described as intelligent and well-respected because they resisted the Viet Minh and stood by the French. But Navarre judged Laos' means correctly: during a presentation in the assembly of the French Union a Laotian member of an economic commission drew a picture of an under-populated and impoverished territory, where peasants lacked capital and equipment while children died early.<sup>856</sup>

Laotian loyalty also surfaces in Pierre Schoendoerffer's *La 317<sup>e</sup> section*. There, villagers welcome an exhausted column of French and Laotian soldiers offering them tea, food and opium. Even so, the same villagers and some auxiliaries flee advancing Viet Minh. Throughout the book the Laotian auxiliaries are portrayed as kind but naïve and childish men, prone to mishaps and speaking only a pidgin French.

Cambodia and its Khmer majority have to some extent been personified by King/Prince<sup>857</sup> Norodom Sihanouk to this day. Schooled in Saigon and France, the latter took over the country's throne at the age of eighteen when the Japanese forced his father to resign. After WWII Sihanouk underwent training at French military academies where he attained the rank of a major. Back in Cambodia the prince soon began to play his own fiddle thereby exasperating his French mentors. More than once he threatened to go communist if his country was not offered independence.<sup>858</sup> Unlike his Vietnamese neighbours, he eventually succeeded in ridding the country of the French without firing a shot. Partly because of this success he was adored by large parts of the population but regarded as mentally deranged by his enemies.<sup>859</sup> The prince's seemingly irrational behaviour

<sup>854</sup> Tertrais, *Atlas des guerres d'Indochine*, 25 and 32-3.

<sup>855</sup> Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, 122-3.

<sup>856</sup> *Débats, Union Française*, 23.3.1950, LSE 44 (R26), AUF 1.

<sup>857</sup> Before winning the elections of 1955 and becoming prime minister, Sihanouk passed on the throne to his father. See Dalloz, *Dictionnaire de la guerre d'Indochine*, 178.

<sup>858</sup> *The Economist*, 9.5.1953.

<sup>859</sup> *Die Zeit*, 18<sup>th</sup> week, 1965.

coloured notably General Navarre's memories. He commented on the prince, the country and its people:

... Cambodia had lived in relative quietness until the beginning of 1953, which however troubled internal dissidents of whom certain were not without more or less acknowledged links to the Vietminh. The illusion of not being at risk, its position a bit out of the way from the rest of Indochina, its contacts with Siam, the interest it raised with the Americans and British [...] all that prompted it to take against us a very independent attitude and to seek to lean on others than us [...] with the result that Cambodia became a closed field of British, Siamese and American intrigue more or less directed against France. The character of the young King Norodom Sihanouk was not made to overcome the difficulties. Of a pronounced personality, intelligent, very friendly towards France and the French but versatile and exalted he was full of the mystical conviction that the high mission had been accorded to him to lead his country to complete independence. Although he very well saw the dangers, he regarded it as his duty to go towards the end of this mission [...]. The uncertainty of our politics, coupled with a certain number of blunders [...] lead him in June 1953 to take an openly hostile attitude towards us [...] They [the relations] were restored with difficulty towards the end of 1953 and a fragile *modus vivendi* set in militarily and politically. In fact, Cambodia acted henceforth like an independent state towards us, receiving our aid like an acquired right but not accepting any orders. The effort of the Cambodian war, despite spectacular manifestations was more or less nil. Cambodia became for us a heavy weight much more than an auxiliary until the end of the war.<sup>860</sup>

The irony of Navarre's assessment would not have been lost on American military observers, who would have recognised in Sihanouk's actions those of their French counterparts. With his enigmatic style the king/prince did however highlight that his subjects differed from their neighbours. Earlier cited Raymond Lescastreyres felt indeed that Cambodians/Khmer had little in common with their Viet neighbours.<sup>861</sup> In view of the limited contacts though, the 'Cambodian character' seems to have eluded the French leading to some slightly odd pondering. Jacques Raphaël-Leygues witnessed water celebrations in Pnom Penh while flying across the territory. Although enchanted by the sight, he feared that the calmly toiling peasants further in the countryside would kill them if the crew was forced to land.<sup>862</sup>

Or maybe he had a point. In the middle of the war Marguarite Duras published *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*, based on her early life near the Cambodian town of Prey Nop during the 1920s.<sup>863</sup> The book paints a depressing picture of French colonial rule based on corruption and racism. The territory was little developed but plagued by hopelessness, famine and high infant mortality.

<sup>860</sup> Navarre, *Agonie de l'Indochine*, 123-4.

<sup>861</sup> [www.duhamel.bz/indochine/1952.htm](http://www.duhamel.bz/indochine/1952.htm).

<sup>862</sup> Raphaël-Leygues, *Ponts de lianes*, 39.

<sup>863</sup> *The Cambodia Daily*, 19/20.10.2002 ([www.camnet.com.kh/cambodia.daily/selected\\_features/duras.htm](http://www.camnet.com.kh/cambodia.daily/selected_features/duras.htm)).



d) *Minorities*

Given their large number, not all ethnic groups have been covered in interviews, memoirs and official records. The various societies have often been lumped together in the term *montagnards*. A military study conducted in 1951 for instance sought to evaluate the requirements and difficulties of setting up a southern Vietnamese division comprising mostly minorities. Throughout the text the author(s) referred to them simply as *montagnards*.<sup>864</sup>

We content ourselves here with four groups that have prompted (ex-)soldiers to muse in some length on characters, appearances and customs. Most comments have in common that their authors have put great emphasis on a) the minorities' relative backwardness, b) their distinctive outlook, c) the antagonism towards the Viet majority, d) their loyalty to the French, e) their need for protection and f) their bleak fate after the French retreat from the north. Perhaps this (unintentionally) echoed classic divide-and-rule tactics. Nguyen Man Ha, a former Viet Minh representative negotiating with Admiral d'Argenlieu, maintained that his French counterpart admitted to having been instructed by de Gaulle to pursue a policy of division. General Giap on the other hand claimed to speak three minority languages in order to reach out to a wider audience.<sup>865</sup> The communist accusations are partly based on historic precedents: Cooper has explained that the French had justified their presence in Indochina by their defence of local interests against Siamese and Chinese aspirations.<sup>866</sup> It was a logical step from such a position to maintain that smaller groups needed to be protected against the biggest one in Vietnam itself. Yet this fails to incorporate the fact that minorities cannily collaborated with both sides depending on the tide. In so doing these communities enjoyed considerable leverage in their decisions. Remembering this, let us now have a look at the first group.

Keeping in mind the problematic generalisations associated with terminology, the Moi are today spread over a wide area reaching as far north as Hue and as far south as Saigon.<sup>867</sup> Massu and his men came into contact with this particular ethnicity in the early months of the war and during operations in the south. To him the Moi represented friendly, little people whose primitive lifestyle and relative fragility made them potential targets of the Viet Minh. In his memoirs the later General reminisced:

The curious race of the Moi [...] gains the sympathy of all my men straightaway. It is evident at first sight that they are not Annamites. Their bronze, powerful corps [...] is covered by a simple loincloth. Being the former occupiers of the plains they are [...] suspicious because these primitives were driven into the bushes of central Indochina by the yellows [...] Very determined not to let themselves be "colonised" nor chased any more they oppose the Viet-Minh with a wild resistance [...] Our soldiers have [...] to seriously show their good intentions to be admitted into their forest villages, strongly defended by palisades [...] But with us, who

<sup>864</sup> 'Réorganisation des forces montagnards des PNS et création de la 4<sup>e</sup> Division vietnamienne de montagne', commandant militaire des pays montagnards du sud et division de montagne, 21.2.1951, private collection of General Georges Fricaud-Chagnaud, SHD 1K 590.

<sup>865</sup> Rousselier, *Vietnam – la première guerre*.

<sup>866</sup> Cooper, *France in Indochina*, 23-4.

<sup>867</sup> Dang Nghiem Van, Chu Thai Son and Luu Hung, *Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam*, 266-275.

fight the same enemy, the entente will be total and we will allow ourselves to admire the delicateness, the generous hospitality and the dignity of this little people. They will agree to join us in our efforts and will be precious partisans.<sup>868</sup>

One cannot contest that many Moi, like other minorities, fought the Viet Minh. What one can question is their motivation and seeming dependency. General Salan held that the Moi actually used the French to reassert themselves in Indochina. Little is known about their fate following the fall of the south in 1975 during the (second) Vietnam War. Perhaps contesting the term Moi, as earlier-cited ethnologists have done, and referring instead to a multitude of smaller groups represents an official attempt to negate their existence. That could have been preceded by prosecution under the ultimate rulers. Nevertheless, the Moi have survived as an entity.

Compared to Massu, the writer André Malraux painted a less positive image of the community in his novel *La voie royale*. Set at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it follows the journey of a young French and an older Dane into the wild triangle between Cambodia, Siam and Laos, which is inhabited by the ferocious Stieng, a sub-group of the Moi. The encounter with the latter ultimately leads to the Dane's death. The underlying message seems to have conveyed that Europeans ventured into the Indochinese wilderness at their own peril.

Hélie de Saint Marc seemed not overly concerned about such risks when ordered to recruit men in the north-Vietnamese highlands. The task brought him into close contact with the Tho. Despite his regional and linguistic ignorance, the 25-year old legionnaire apparently succeeded in putting together a force, which harassed the Viet Minh and denied it access to the area for almost two years. But by 1950 their situation became untenable. Ordered to evacuate the area with only a few trucks, the young lieutenant and fellow legionnaires were forced to push away most of their erstwhile allies and their families. After the evacuation de Saint Marc and his men learned from a few escaped survivors that the Viet Minh had burned down the villages and massacred the population. Even so, he later gathered from boat people that men from the area had been incorporated into the famous Viet Minh division 308. Looking back, the veteran offered an interesting description of the Tho, who were:

... an ethnic minority and an arm of the Thai people (the languages are very close) who differed from the Annamites. Less fine, better built, more muscled, they wore indigo clothes which they produced themselves on wooden machines. They marched bare-footed [...] Eventually peasants, often smugglers, always hunters, they were a nice rebel race. In the tenth century, a Tho kingdom existed whose capital was Cao Bang. Later, the region was disputed between China and the Empire of Annam. The struggle was uncertain, anarchy spread. [...] This long period of troubles had very much influenced the personality of the inhabitants who had kept a hostility towards the established power [...] and an irony for the slightest thing. The women and children were always at work. The men decided, walked about and fought. Under a superficial Buddhism animism dominated the spirits. The Tho

<sup>868</sup>

Massu, *Sept ans avec Leclerc*, 256.

loved rice alcohol and smoked opium in moderation. The daily life, embedded in a plentiful and exuberant nature [...] was marked by a great moral liberty.<sup>869</sup>

Not all military views of minorities have been so positive. The Thai's reputation has suffered from the fact that some of them deserted their positions during the battle of Dien Bien Phu. Some protagonists, like Colonel Langlais, were quick to blame them for the ultimate defeat.<sup>870</sup> Raymond Legoubé, who commanded a Thai unit during the battle, endeavoured to set the record straight. He freely admitted that some of his men had left their positions against orders. But he also pointed out that they had been ill-suited for the classic, defensive role in which they had been employed during the battle. Equally, they lacked proper instruction, a sufficient number of officers and NCOs and, as a result, the necessary cohesion. Worse in the veteran's view, many legionnaires and paratroopers looked down on them. But more interesting for our purpose is Legoubé's depiction of the Thai's character, their original, military value and their reason for abandoning Dien Bien Phu:

*Montagnard*, used to the jungle, the Thai is a hardy and frugal runner of tracks. An observer, he has the instinct of the hunter: He knows how to read signs [...] Fighter at home, he knows how to profit from his knowledge of the land [...] In this context, the battalion shows its advantages in deep reconnaissance across the half-empty zones of the Thai country [...] He is more at ease acting subtly rather than forcibly: defending a position without being able to retreat is not his strength. [...] Surprised and in inferior position, the Thai will not hesitate to 'explode' in order to re-assemble later and further away. [...] The Thai who abandoned their combat site in front of the enemy are effectively deserters. Yet they did not join the Viet Minh [...] It is probable that in their minds they were not aware of committing a crime: They left behind their weapons, ammunition, equipment, often even their uniforms. Some even asked their lower European cadres permission to leave. [...] If they heartily detest the Vietnamese in general and the Viet Minh in particular the sense of nation is alien to them: their land is their village, at most their 'chau' - their district. Now, the Thai of the BT3 originate for the most part from the region of Sonla and Moc Chau. Without being alien this earth of DPB [Dien Bien Phu] is not theirs. In addition, the war which took place since March 13 is not the one they are used to. [...] So the Thai left [...] [in] a sort of [...] unilateral termination of their contract.

Legoubé further highlighted that up to 500 Thai had remained in the trenches to the bitter end and had endured captivity. They suffered worse retributions than their French counterparts due to the Viet Minh's view of them as traitors. Still, the Thai as a whole survived the war and still populate the north-west of today's Vietnam.<sup>871</sup>

<sup>869</sup> De Saint Marc, *Mémoires*, 102-126 (quote on p. 104).

<sup>870</sup> See P. Langlais, *Dien Bien Phu* (1963), p. 29, as quoted in Legoubé's private collection (below).

<sup>871</sup> Dang Nghiem Van, Chu Thai Son and Luu Hung, *Ethnic minorities in Vietnam*, 126.

Legoubé also defended the French cadres commanding the Thai. The fact that the BT3 was the only one not considered worthy of citation has traumatised, in his opinion, these officers and NCOs.<sup>872</sup>

Alfred McCoy<sup>873</sup> has hinted at an intriguing detail in connection with the Thai and the battle: Dien Bien Phu was populated by Black Thai. They opposed the White Thai minority, whose leader had been entrusted by the French with the administration of the semi-autonomous Thai highlands. It was White Thai battalions that sat in Dien Bien Phu's trenches while Black Thai enthusiastically supported the Viet Minh.<sup>874</sup>

Relations with the Meo showed similar patterns. Originally from south-western China, many of this group had fled from Manchu persecution and Viet pressure into north-eastern Laos and the Tonkin highlands. When the French arrived in the 1890s colonial officers began to purchase opium cultivated by the Meo. After the Japanese interregnum the returning colonial administrators established contact with a loyal Meo leader. The latter had previously helped to change local subsistence into large-scale cash crop farming through use of an excessive opium tax. The levy drove many impoverished Meo into the arms of an opposing clan leader, who linked up with the Pathet Lao and the Viet Minh. Meo from north-western Tonkin, who had been cheated in the drug trade by Thai middlemen, also rallied to the Viet Minh during the battle of Dien Bien Phu.

The French administration began to wind down the official opium trade and then curb its use in 1946. But French intelligence services and paramilitary agencies, led by Colonel Grall (replaced by *Commandant*/Colonel Trinquier in 1953) and earlier cited Captain Savani, clandestinely took the administration's place to swell their hitherto meagre war coffers. Under 'Operation X', sanctioned by General Salan, opium was bought from Meo and Thai cultivators and transported to Saigon. There, it was processed and sold by the Binh Xuen under Savani's eyes. The proceeds were divided among all participants and largely used to finance sectarian militia in Cochinchina and the mixed airborne units in the highlands. In his memoirs General Salan defended his involvement by stating: "The *montagnards* [...] are the friends of those who buy opium." He also rightly pointed out that such deals had often been struck in earlier colonial times with the consent of the French *gouverneurs-généraux*.

André Thabaut for his part devoted much of his memoirs to the men he had spent months with and with whom he had established close relations. The military doctor initially held a few stereotypes of the Muong:

My first contact with the Muong made them look different from how my imagination, according to 'gossip', had presented them to me: they are not the wild mountain warriors, capable of eating the livers of their beaten opponents. Physically, I think it is not easy to

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<sup>872</sup> R. Legoubé, *Un bataillon obscur dans une bataille célébré: Le BT3 à Dien Bien Phu* (2000), private collection, SHD 1KT 1218.

<sup>873</sup> The following three paragraphs are based on his edited *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (1973), pp. 78-87 and Salan, *Mémoires*, 384-6.

<sup>874</sup> Legoubé, perhaps wrongly, held that the majority in his battalion had been black Thai, too.

distinguish them from the Vietnamese in the delta, in which, after all, they have now lived for several years. They are physically very fine, seem quick, intelligent and skilful.

He also observed that, like the Viet, the Muong were fond of staying up late, singing, playing cards and debating. These activities might explain why younger French officers got along fairly well with their *supplétifs* and earned their respect, while their older colleagues struggled with the Muong's partisan-like style. With the gradual shifting of responsibilities to local forces and authorities, some Muong also became NCOs and officers. Thabaut gained the impression that due to the Muong's feudal social structure, their commanders were regarded as chiefs by their men.

Toward the end of the Indochinese conflict, the authorities offered the Muong the choice of either staying in the north (and being demobbed with advance pay) or moving south with their families. While a small faction decided to remain, especially seasoned soldiers opted for departure. Many, who contemplated this step though, worried about their family's future in a 'foreign land'. The authorities themselves were unclear about where to resettle the soldiers and their families. One possibility was the high plateaux of South Vietnam. The French based their consideration on the original habitat of the minority, ignoring the fact that the Muong had long evacuated the northern highlands under pressure from the Viet Minh.

Thabaut added various, scientific details to his personal memoirs, assisted by Marc Lemaire.<sup>875</sup> Of the aspects Thabaut unearthed were the Sino-Vietnamese origins of the Muong and their original homeland around Hoa Binh and the Black River. Thabaut concluded that, due to historic antagonism, they had barely been tempted by communism embodied by the Viet majority. In this context he applauded the French authorities' offer for evacuation while remaining pessimistic about those staying behind. His mood was based on a French fact-finding mission that had been unable to find any remaining Muong after the war. In view of Dang Nghiem Van, Chu Thai Son and Luu Hung estimating their number at over 900,000<sup>876</sup> such pessimism might have been unjustified.

Lemaire inserted various details on Muong culture and lifestyle, which need not be repeated. But it is worth pointing out that, contrary to other ethnicities, Muong women rarely agreed to become mistresses of French personnel. Further, the group was granted limited autonomy in return for their cooperation. Lemaire also conceded that not all Muong had rallied to the French and that some had deserted after being recruited.<sup>877</sup>

#### e) *French expatriates*

The enthusiasm and relief of expatriates greeting the first French troops to embark in Saigon and Haiphong did not last. As in Malaya, the meeting of local European civilians and new military arrivals came to be marked by mutual uneasiness and misunderstanding. While a sentence,

<sup>875</sup> Lemaire is the author of *Le service de santé militaire dans la guerre d'Indochine* (1997).

<sup>876</sup> *Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam*, 14.

<sup>877</sup> Thabaut, *Médecin Lieutenant au 1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon Muong*, 39-50, 86, 133-5 and 144-8 (quote on pp. 39-40).

gesture or outlook often sufficed to trigger long-held resentment among British servicemen, members of the CEFEO usually reacted in a particular way as a result of longer conversations or interactions with civilians. If class played a dominant role in Malaya, encounters in Indochina reflected a growing rift between the French military and society in general, particularly back in France.

That said, reactions depended on specific factions. According to Bodin, soldiers categorised their compatriots broadly into six, somewhat overlapping and therefore slightly confusing, categories: 'old colonial hands', *petits blancs*,<sup>878</sup> plantation managers and other businessmen, administrators, missionaries and prostitutes. The 'old hands' had lived in Indochina for decades, having often served in the army or navy themselves.<sup>879</sup> Newly-arriving soldiers could identify with them to some degree. However, the prevalence of alcoholism in this group often elicited more pity than friendship. Relations with the *petits blancs* on the other hand could be cordial but delicate. Planters, although admired for their courage, were deemed to put themselves at a needless risk in their isolated plots. Vice versa, the latter and expatriates in general censured the CEFEO for its failure to provide security. (Small) businessmen, such as owners of restaurants, bars and dance halls, appeared to be merely interested in servicemen's meagre pay. When it came to the colonial administration, servicemen felt that customs officers particularly were sheltered, better paid and corrupt. As for missionaries, they were widely suspected of sympathising with the Viet Minh. They were also resented for their refusal to provide valuable information on their Asian flock. The clergy for its part dared to criticise the increasingly brutal methods employed by some elements of the armed forces. Lastly, servicemen made ample use of prostitutes' services. To some the latter evoked happy memories of France.

Stereotypes shaped opinions. Soldiers regarded many expatriates as wartime collaborators, colonial reactionaries and racists. Furthermore, many gained the impression that they were not so much fighting for peace and stability in Indochina but for the interests and protection of a few civilians. The latter in turn held against the troops that they lacked knowledge of their situation and the territory.<sup>880</sup>

Before we look into individual reactions it is necessary to further sketch the composition of the expatriate community. In this context, the reader should recall the somewhat artificial distinction between newer and older arrivals.

By and large, French civilians arriving in Indochina preferred towns and cities to rural areas. By the turn of the century 3,000 lived in Saigon and 1,088 in Hanoi, as opposed to 825 in Cambodia and 50 in Laos. Their background and professions varied greatly. (Ex-)soldiers, manufacturers, butchers, bakers, watch-makers, jewellers, booksellers, hairdressers, pharmacists, tailors, cobblers, plumbers, café owners, teachers, postal clerks, lawyers, judges, missionaries, planters, engineers and merchants made Indochina their home.

<sup>878</sup> Literally 'small whites'. The term 'petit' suggests that these were mostly people with low incomes. Among them figured men employed on plantations and mines, as well as forest and transport workers.

<sup>879</sup> One hundred fifty demobilised men of Leclerc's 2<sup>e</sup> DB received a special government grant to settle in Indochina, for example. They founded a plantation at Dak Mil where the core remained until American bombardments forced them out during the Vietnam War. See Delpard, *Les rizières de la souffrance*, 62-3.

<sup>880</sup> Three paragraphs based on Bodin, *Les combattants français face à la guerre d'Indochine*, 40-2.

Of all these groups, missionaries represented one of the largest and most influential. As early as 1904 roughly 500 bishops, priests and nuns spread the gospel in Vietnam and Cambodia.<sup>881</sup> Spurred and supported by the French navy, diplomats and the papacy, missionary activity initially developed in close cooperation with mercantile institutions. The drive came to a temporary halt during the 1789 revolution and the Napoleonic wars but was renewed under the Bourbon dynasty. Led by the *Société des missions étrangères*, to which most clerical institutions in Indochina were affiliated,<sup>882</sup> missions spread rapidly, in particular under the Guizot premiership (1840-8). The latter supported the idea of French *points d'appui*<sup>883</sup> in Asia. However, the Catholic intrusion into Indochina triggered angry responses of local dynasties who disliked missionary support of rival factions to the throne(s). Moreover, the fast growing and often rebellious Christian community in Indochina (totalling 300,000 in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) attached a subversive stigma to Catholicism. It resulted in official persecution, which in turn prompted French naval interventions.

Although conversion of the local population helped pacification, administrators and officers took offence at the Christian missionary zeal, too. Relations considerably improved with the end of official anti-clericalism in France (1848). It worsened again after Pope Benedict XV's order to abandon secular loyalties in 1919 and to transfer responsibilities to Asians. Still, the church's local representatives remained largely neutral during the nationalist agitation of the early 1930s. Individual priests did however criticise the heavy taxation on the population. While still requiring official approval, missionary dispensaries, maternity 'hospitals', nurseries, leper colonies and municipalities contributed to France's *mission civilisatrice*. The cooperation continued throughout WWII as the local clergy welcomed Vichy's idea of a state based on religious ideals. By that time roughly 340 European missionaries, assisted by 1,400 Vietnamese priests, oversaw just under two million baptised. Most of the latter were to be found among the poor in the Tonkin and among minorities of the northern highlands. Those converted often found themselves ostracised by their neighbours. Significantly, the church failed to attract much following among the Vietnamese middle class and elite. Perhaps as a result, the clergy did not ordain a Vietnamese bishop until 1933.<sup>884</sup>

Ironically, Vietnamese Catholics were among the most vocal and aggressive agitators following the Japanese collapse. Only during the French re-conquest could missionaries return to their often burnt down and pillaged communities. The military's eventual retreat from the northern areas led to a renewed flight of European and, in part, Asian clergy. The remaining Vietnamese Catholics initially welcomed Ho Chi Minh, having campaigned for an end to European tutelage within the church. But many changed their mind when increasing taxes, mandatory Marxist courses and the control of religious services ensued after 1952. When the communist grip hardened in 1955 up to 700,000 Catholics fled the north. A little later the last French priests were ordered to leave.<sup>885</sup>

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<sup>881</sup> Aldrich, *Greater France*, 147-8 and G. de Gantès in Chafer & Sackur, *Promoting the Colonial Idea*, 15-27.

<sup>882</sup> Some were Spanish, originating from bases in the Philippines.

<sup>883</sup> 'Strongpoints'.

<sup>884</sup> The Dominicans never appointed any, to be precise.

<sup>885</sup> Section on missionaries based on Tuck, *French Catholic Missionaries and the Politics of Imperialism in Vietnam*, 20-33 and L. Garcia, *Quand les missionnaires rencontraient les Vietnamiens (1920-1960)* (2008), pp. 7-13, 29-33, 92-5, 121-35, 146-53, 161-4 and 181-5.

Available recollections attest to ambivalent military-clerical relations. The army doctor André Thabaut for instance received a priest and a bishop after the end of hostilities. The latter directed a school in Hanoi and revealed that many of his students had joined the Viet Minh where they had reached cadre positions. To Thabaut's annoyance the priest admitted holding some admiration for the ideological fervour of the guerrillas. The doctor mused in his memoirs whether his visitor had belonged to the so called '*christo-marxists*' advocating liberation theories. He suspected that the thousands of Catholic refugees had not shared the priest's admiration.<sup>886</sup>

General Le Chatelier saw a different picture when he toured southern Vietnam in 1955. Stopping during a drive from Dalat to Saigon, he was invited by a nun to visit her leper colony. There the young officer was impressed by the joyfulness of both the sick and their carers, who operated with very limited funds and relied on spare military supplies. Le Chatelier parted satisfied by the thought of how much the nuns and others had done for Indochina.<sup>887</sup>

Military views of colonial administrators were more homogenous and negative. Bigeard commented in his memoirs:

I'm sickened by their behaviour. No sense of duty and one worry only, to enrich themselves to the maximum thanks to the opium and piastre traffic. I don't support that my men die as veritable heroes while others fill their pockets. I send a report to Hanoi. The effect is immediate. The [local] administrator is relieved of his functions.

Unfortunately, Bigeard lost his command, too, a few weeks later. General Valluy admitted that the authorities had not appreciated his report.<sup>888</sup> Roger Delpey was equally dismissive after an encounter with an administrator but for a different reason:

The interests of this village are served by an administrative delegate, a young Frenchman, freshly graduated from Paris' *Ecole coloniale*. The legionnaires rudely respond on every occasion [...] to this little delegate, whose head is filled with philanthropic theories acquired in a school, which should have re-considered its programmes long ago. For this civil servant there is no Viet Minh, no enemy, no rebel; there are only misled people who can be led back on the right path with evangelical gentleness. He believes in the soundness of his school's theories and – faithfully – goes about applying them. He still believes in pacification without rifles! Tieucan [the village] was to witness tragic events and its pacifist delegate could revisit his theories...<sup>889</sup>

Robert Dibon for his part was told by expatriates that there was little point in re-asserting sovereignty, in view of the widespread hatred of the French among the Vietnamese. At one point he encountered two civilians who had apparently fought in the resistance against the Japanese – alongside the Viet Minh. They blamed extremists for the worsening security situation. Dibon

<sup>886</sup> Thabaut, *Médecin Lieutenant au 1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon Muong*, 110-1.

<sup>887</sup> SHD 1KT 442.

<sup>888</sup> Bigeard, *Ma guerre d'Indochine*.

<sup>889</sup> Delpey, *Soldats de la boue*, 113-4.



also heard that European and Eurasian policemen frequently tortured Viet Minh suspects. Yet a member of the force, he encountered, insisted that the police strongly disapproved of such methods. Further north Dibon and his colleagues were frenetically welcomed by their compatriots upon entering Haiphong in 1946. The contrasting insights prompted him to reflect on cultural differences, colonialism, the French presence and re-conquest: "Suddenly, I thought that in comparison [to the Vietnamese] the Europeans are brutes and childish at the same time... One can force the respect and love of these people only by natural dignity, not with fanfares... [...] Has one ever tried to understand them... to love them?"<sup>890</sup>

Misunderstanding and miscommunication certainly played into inter-French relations. General de Bollardi re lamented in his memoirs:

In Saigon I was [...] struck and deeply disappointed by the misunderstanding, which appeared between the new arrivals and the French of Indochina. The latter expected us as liberators. They encountered only a slightly scornful condescension, a wholly unjustified contempt: many [expatriates] had cruelly suffered and had sacrificed themselves in a combat without hope [against the Japanese]. Their often heroic acts [...] were ignored and disregarded. Admiral Decoux, governor-general relieved of his functions without honour, was brutally thrown in prison after his return to France.<sup>891</sup>

It is debatable whether the entire expatriate community resisted the Japanese coup in March 1945. And Decoux's loyalty to Vichy France and his prosecution of Free French in Indochina did not endear him to liberated France.

General Hinterlang for his part quoted the example of the planter Lalanne whom he described as an "impressive person" but also a "tyrant". The latter had arrived in Indochina in 1918 after having chased 'pirates' on the Mekong. Together with an agricultural expert he had taken over a small plantation, gradually extending control over an entire sector. Assisted by numerous engineers and assistants the two men cultivated tea and fruits in a region also featuring Michelin's rubber estates. Hinterlang was charged with taking command of local partisans who had been organised to protect the area. Upon his arrival Lalanne had already recruited some NCOs of the *Groupement Massu*. He had also bought arms and transport equipment, including small planes from German and American stocks. Connections with the highest military and administrative circles had proven helpful in this. The manager unsuccessfully tried to involve fellow planters but most relied on official protection. This prompted Hinterlang to suspect that some had secretly paid the Viet Minh in exchange for being left alone.<sup>892</sup> Other images of planters showed them as lonely but persistent and brave men, working side by side with their staff and sharing the constant worry of communist attacks. The only respite came during evenings in restaurants and bars in nearby cities and towns.<sup>893</sup>

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<sup>890</sup> SHD 1KT 330.

<sup>891</sup> De Bollardi re, *Bataille d'Alger*, 50-1.

<sup>892</sup> Interview, 13.5. and 24.6.1997, SHD/DITEEX 3K 8 - XI - (12AV 85) and - XII - (12AV 103).

<sup>893</sup> *Paris Match*, no. 84, 28.10.1950.

To complement such views it might be worth quoting former members of the expatriate community themselves. Among them was Yvonne Fontane, who recalled a happy childhood in a beautiful Hanoi full of gardens. She fittingly commented: “We [the children] were really kings.” Fontane belonged to a family of colonial administrators, of which she was not ashamed because, in her view, they “... contributed to creating many interesting and nice things in the country.” She conceded that administrators had been well paid and that their families had enjoyed a rich social life. This world fell apart with the Japanese coup after which the family merely tried to survive. When Ho Chi Minh declared independence in front of a frenetic crowd they did not dare venture outside. According to Fontane, even the Vietnamese house-staff was frightened but felt compelled to stand in front of the house and greet the crowds. Her father urged the apparently reluctant *boys* and *boyesses* to leave if their presence in the house became too dangerous. Fontane concluded somewhat naively that: “We were very detached from this. [...] historically speaking we were not part of the problem.”<sup>894</sup>

Given the heterogeneous composition of the CEFEO and the expatriate community, it is relatively difficult to connect military reactions with class or regional schisms. In fact, the two groups probably had more in common than either would have had with the metropolitan population. The army of the 1940s and 1950s, like the colonial societies, represented a relatively outmoded group, embodying values at odds with the growing consumerism at home. Many men (had) joined the army precisely because they did not want to be “at the mercy of their clients”.<sup>895</sup> Ironically, the aversion towards business and materialism had carried them into a region where resources were extracted to fuel the former. The military and settlers were also more attached to empire than a largely uninterested population in France. Still, certain metropolitan facets could have played a role in inter-French relations, albeit on a subconscious level.

French society continued to be divided into the bourgeoisie, the middle class (*petite bourgeoisie*, artisans, small shopkeepers, teachers and *cadres moyens*), peasants and the urban working class during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite revolutionary rhetoric, status in France depended very much on class, occupation and education. Consequently, the industrial and commercial elite managed to keep its hold on the political process. In view of the fact that the *Armée coloniale* counted many officers from the lower middle-classes, encounters with senior colonial administrators or managers of the *Banque de l'Indochine* were fraught with potential friction. Given on the other hand that 27% of the active metropolitan population still worked the land by 1954, soldiers from farming background possibly struggled to identify with an expatriate community made up largely of urban artisans. Younger soldiers and officers had also witnessed massive industrialisation, large-scale flight from rural areas, population growth and mass education, from which Indochina had remained sheltered. Back home, the number of salaried workers increased at the expense of farmers and miners, who swelled the ranks of unskilled industrial workers in urban factories, construction, transport and service. In parallel, technicians, engineers, *cadres supérieurs*, teachers and scientists assumed a new importance, even if their

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<sup>894</sup> Rousselier, *Vietnam – la première guerre*.

<sup>895</sup> Quote by General Georges Buis, interview, 6.11.1997, SHD/DITEEX, 3K 27 – I – (12AV 156).

overall percentage remained low.<sup>896</sup> Yet these professions remained rare in Southeast Asia or had long returned home.

#### f) *Eurasians*

Emanuelle Saada has stated that within the French empire *métissage*<sup>897</sup> had been most intensely debated and experimented with in Indochina. Specific passages in the 1954 Geneva Accords even resulted in thousands of Eurasian children being taken away from their Asian mothers and sent to France. Nevertheless, historians have been unable to determine the exact number of *métis* in the French Empire/Union. This partly owes to the reluctance of indigenous populations to be counted so as to avoid taxation. Categorisations (Europeans, *métis*, *assimilés* or *indigènes*) were also notoriously wobbly. Officially, Eurasians counted as *résidus*<sup>898</sup> but fatherless Eurasian children were categorised as *indigènes*. According to the *Société des métis de l'Indochine* and the *Fédération eurasiennne* 500 Eurasians lived in Indochina by 1904, swelling to 300,000 by 1952, with 50,000 considered French nationals. Yet these estimations were based on counts in individual cities and provinces in the absence of territory-wide registrations.<sup>899</sup>

It appears as if French servicemen saw Eurasians as a natural ingredient of the Indochinese population without entirely ignoring their delicate situation. Prominent or cooperative *métis* heightened the profile of the racially mixed community. Former lieutenant Henri Denis would have struggled to command partisans without his Eurasian interpreter, although he eventually learned the local tongue.<sup>900</sup> Graham Greene visited the previously-mentioned Colonel Leroy. The barely 32 years old *métis* appeared to him the “most assured and happiest” of all *seigneurs* in Cochinchina. The writer was greeted by a band playing the film tune to *The Third Man* while dancers performed in front of an artificial lake. The colonel offered his visitor cognac while citing Proudhon and Montesquieu. The “curious but imposing personality” boldly advocated the partition of large estates and their distribution to small farmers. He also organised local elections for a consultative assembly. Further, he ordered the construction of almost 100 security posts in Cochinchina.<sup>901</sup> One could hold that such bold measures might have been more difficult to take for someone more embedded in a community and its customs, i.e. for ‘pure Viet’.

The fact that many Eurasians staffed the police, including the notorious *secrîté*, bars, dance halls and brothels<sup>902</sup> hinted at the *métis*’ problematic situation. A pensive Robert Dibon wrote in his memoirs:

<sup>896</sup> J. Marceau, *Class and Status in France: Economic Change and Social Immobility, 1945-1975* (1977), pp. 6-38.

<sup>897</sup> ‘Miscegenation’.

<sup>898</sup> Literally ‘residue’.

<sup>899</sup> E. Saada, *Les enfants de la colonie: les métis de l'Empire français entre sujétion et citoyenneté* (2007), pp. 34-7 & 51-4

<sup>900</sup> Interview, 5.8.1998, SHD/DITEEX 3K 41 - II - 12AV (282).

<sup>901</sup> *Paris Match* no. 5.-12.173, July 1952.

<sup>902</sup> Thabaut, *Médecin lieutenant au 1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon Muong*, 53-4.

It is the half-castes on whom we can count the most. They are very numerous in the police, either as auxiliaries or actives. Yet, their white masculine parents have abandoned them to their fate as half-castes for which they cannot be envied. But the colleagues [...] tell us horrific stories concerning these people. About the interrogations in their localities: real sadists, they tell us.<sup>903</sup>

Such statements are difficult to verify. Likewise, the perpetrators' motivations, if they did indeed commit those acts, invites tricky speculation. How does one explain, to quote another example, the incentive of someone like the French-Vietnamese Captain Parel, who hunted Viet Minh on his own in the region of Tay Ninh?<sup>904</sup> What seems obvious is that many Eurasians chose to side with the French.

Kim Lefèvre, himself a *métis* has analysed the circumstances and resulting attitudes of this group. He has paid particular attention to relations between settlers and young Vietnamese women, the *con gai*, between 1925 and 1945. The former habitually offered material benefits, i.e. pay and accommodation, in exchange for the company of the latter. Many *con gai* were orphans, widows or simply peasants fleeing poverty in the countryside. Often infused with strong Confucian morals and sexually ignorant, they were preyed on by human traffickers. These provided even the lowliest and ugliest Frenchman with a young mistress.

Most *con gai* knew that their 'partners' would eventually leave the territory and abandon them. They were equally aware that they had dishonoured themselves in Vietnamese eyes and stood little chance of marrying men from their ethnic community. To spare their families problems they frequently cut all links with them. To make matters worse, the consolidation of French power brought the arrival of metropolitan wives and families. The latter despised the *con gai* and their mixed offspring. Despite that, French men, women and children frequently turned to them in troubled times.

Treated like servants in French homes while despised by Asians, young *métis* lacked their parents' social links and religious foundations. Angered by their situation and status, they felt nevertheless superior to their mothers while hating their fathers for their lack of affection and respect. Not rarely, daughters of mixed race became *con gai* themselves, albeit more demanding and troubled ones. In rare cases French men married their mistress, looked after their children and thereby accepted social isolation. Where the latter was too much to bear, institutions like the *Société de protection* or the Taberd School offered asylum to Eurasian offspring.<sup>905</sup>

Afro-Asian relations and offspring proved even more delicate. André Thabaut recounted how his wife had tried to arbitrate and help *tirailleurs sénégalais* and their Asian lovers trying to decide what to do with their children at the end of the war. She told him at the time that many soldiers wished to take the children with them but ran up against the opposition of their Asian mistresses.<sup>906</sup>

<sup>903</sup> SHD 1KT 330.

<sup>904</sup> Delpard, *Les rizières de la souffrance*, 94-5.

<sup>905</sup> K. Lefèvre, 'Eves jaunes et colons blancs' in Franchini, *Saigon 1925-45*, 111-119.

<sup>906</sup> Thabaut, *Médecin Lieutenant au 1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon Muong*, 122.

Servicemen of any colour, who lived with their *con gai* (and children), could become more attached to Indochina but more detached from France (or Africa). In parallel, they turned more sedentary thereby complicating changes of posts. In some cases they also lost some of their combativeness although the case for the opposite could easily be made.<sup>907</sup>

#### g) Women and sexuality

Although women obviously made up a large percentage of all groups previously treated they merit a separate analysis. Bernard Fall once remarked that: "This would have been a very un-French war if women had not played an important role in it." Soldiers stationed in Indochina did indeed keenly observe and interact with the other sex. Much of that occurred within the military itself to the effect that French servicewomen appear to have caused greater sensation and sympathy than female civilians of either race. This was in part due to the fact that they belonged to a French minority that cared about the CEFEO's fate.

Female ambulance drivers and pilots caught many military eyes. One of them was Paule Dupont d'Isigny. An accomplished pilot and paratrooper, she served with the *Infirmières pilotes secouristes de l'air* (IPSA). Her thirty combat missions earned her a *Croix de guerre*. Others, such as parachute riggers, performed less dangerous but equally important tasks. Then there were the civilian reporters of the French information service like Brigitte Friang. She accompanied troops on various missions, at times parachuting into combat zones.<sup>908</sup> Her colleague, Anne de Buchepot, one day showed up in front of then Captain Aussaresses shortly before they were ambushed. The latter was stunned to see the photographer calmly taking pictures during the ensuing clash. Her courage ultimately caused her death when she was killed during a street battle in Saigon.<sup>909</sup>

The motivations of these women were undoubtedly manifold. Two of Delpard's female interviewees cited adventure and a desire to be of use as their main motivations. Both could satisfy these wishes during tours of four and a half and six years respectively.<sup>910</sup>

Compared to these metropolitan women their Vietnamese colleagues (serving in the military or related services) have fared less well in soldierly memory – if they have been mentioned at all. This has probably to do with the fact that many were suspected (often rightly so) of serving as spies for the Viet Minh.<sup>911</sup> Similarly anonymous in recollections have been female representatives of the expatriate community, which unquestionably owed to the problematical civilian-military relations. This diverges from the cinematic treatment of this group. Panivong Norindr has been critical of the fact that Catherine Deneuve's character in *Indochine* seems to embody the 'colonial Marianne' looking after her local flock. In the same context, he has suspected that director Annaud was considerably motivated by the sensuality portrayed in Duras' novel, on which *l'Amant* is

<sup>907</sup> Carles, *Des millions des soldats inconnus*, 166.

<sup>908</sup> Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 131-8 (quote p. 131).

<sup>909</sup> Général Aussaresses, *Pour la France: services spéciaux (1942-1954)* (2001), pp. 216-7.

<sup>910</sup> Delpard, *Les rizières de la souffrance*, 84-7.

<sup>911</sup> Interview with General Geoffrey, 14.5.1998, SHD/DITEEX 3K 37 - III - (12AV 249).

based. In Norindr's view it is no coincidence that the main characters in both movies are women. It re-affirmed the common notion of Indochina as something feminine and France's presence as a "stormy love affair".<sup>912</sup>

Speaking of such, Fall maintained that the prevalence of heterosexual relationships was in part due to the fact that polygamy was not banned in Indochina until 1958. Until then: "The existence of easy-to-get sex is treated matter-of-factly by everyone..." So common was the practice that the author once detected a sign outside the women's pagoda on Hanoi's Great Lake forbidding sex in the building. British liaison officer Henry Hill was clearly taken aback by such customs. Yet he could not bring himself to refuse his hosts' invitation to the regimental brothel despite worrying about the reputation of the British Army. He was even more shocked by the sight of the brothel mother and her very young employees whom Hill regarded as "clearly unsuitable for such a place." He managed to save his face by showing his French colleagues a few drink games. The evening proved a success and all got on "awfully well" thereafter.<sup>913</sup>

In order not to neglect less centrally stationed troops the army sent out BMCs to posts scattered over the Indochinese landscape. The French authorities argued that controlled establishments and workers reduced rape and the spread of venereal diseases. Prostitutes not only contributed to soldiers' morale but often ended up looking after the wounded as auxiliary nurses. A BMC was even stationed in Dien Bien Phu. Fall also cited 73 French prostitutes who serviced a large clientele of rich merchants, senior administrators and military personnel in Saigon. When General de Lattre put an end to their activities a distressed chief of intelligence informed him that the women had been on the army's payroll.<sup>914</sup>

Asian females competed with their European and North African counterparts. A Laotian entertained Jules Roy, who had been invited to a noble establishment by a rich *métis* merchant. Roy duly covered his nightly experiences in *Les belles croisades* (1959). Years later he mused on the local population, describing it as "silent, cunning [preferring] to put the occupier to sleep with opium and girls before cutting his throat".<sup>915</sup> Roger Delpey on the other hand recounted how the men in his post rejected the offers of company made by elderly villagers in exchange for 300 piastres. More than potential danger or moral doubts weighed the men's conviction that the women had already been sold to others.<sup>916</sup>

Yet some Asian mistresses saved lives. General Aussaresses recollected how a Chinese woman had achieved the release of her captured French lover by paying a ransom to the Viet Minh.<sup>917</sup> But such loyalty had its risks. Local lovers, wives and families were easy and preferred targets for the insurgents, regardless of whether they lived in protected *camps de mariés*, in the garrisons or in villages. Fall quoted several examples, particularly of women belonging to ethnic minorities, who had been killed after the departure of their French partners. Their mixed offspring suffered ostracism if left to live.<sup>918</sup>

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<sup>912</sup> Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina*, 131-145.

<sup>913</sup> Interview, 13.6.1986, IWM, 9314.

<sup>914</sup> Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 132-6.

<sup>915</sup> Roy, *Mémoires barbares*, 403.

<sup>916</sup> Delpey, *Soldats de la boue*, 128.

<sup>917</sup> Aussaresses, *Pour la France*, 247.

<sup>918</sup> Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 141.

The lot of soldiers' wives and families was generally not an easy one, either. Those, who accompanied their husbands and fathers to Indochina, did not see them often. Aussaresses married locally between two operations.<sup>919</sup> General Simon noted in his diary on October 7, 1951 the arrival of a truck filled with his Cambodian men's wives. The post's limited size only allowed for a few days of reunion.<sup>920</sup>

The varying female roles described above run counter to the often ambivalent connection between colonialism, war and women in literature. Alexander Soucy has analysed the role of women in modern Vietnamese society, including allusions to the past. He has maintained that they have initiated reform in their society over the centuries. Similarly, they have also played an important part in the struggle against invaders. Despite that, patriarchal, Confucian values have impacted on their lives to this day.<sup>921</sup>

Undeniably, women played a crucial role in the Indochina War, particularly among the Viet Minh. Several of the interviewees in the documentary *Indochine – La première guerre* are women. But their involvement went along with a strong rejection of feudal, Confucian values. The *con gai*, too, ignored at least some of these norms due to the difficult situation they found themselves in.

Penny Edwards for her part has looked into written documentation of the early French administration in Cambodia. Although administrators' situation slightly differed from that of soldiers, the attitude towards the territory and its women shows parallels. Edwards has identified a habit of portraying Cambodia and colonies in general as something female to be conquered, ruled and protected by strong and adventurous men. But she has not necessarily attributed these images to the intermediary role of *con gai*, Cambodia's status as the oldest and 'easiest' Indochinese protectorate, or a general, imperial desire for domination. The latter notion would overlook that *Marianne* represented France itself. Edwards has regarded the myths of male power and female subordination more as a reaction to the gradual emancipation in Europe and the arrival of French women in Indochina. Male colonisers deemed it necessary to protect oriental females from modern developments.<sup>922</sup>

Some of this can be found in veterans' recollections. But, as we have seen, the view of French women has been more positive, certainly in the case of metropolitan servicewomen. Asian counterparts represented not just passive victims of chauvinism either. Females in soldierly memory might come closer, if a bit unfairly, to the century-old stereotype of either being saints or whores. Indeed, in most military portraits the quoted women are either nuns, nurses or *con gai*.

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<sup>919</sup> Aussaresses, *Pour la France*, 225.

<sup>920</sup> Simon, *Chroniques de Cochinchine*, 75.

<sup>921</sup> A. Soucy, 'Romantic Love and Gender Hegemony in Vietnam' in S. Blackburn (ed.), *Love, Sex and Power: Women in Southeast Asia* (2001), pp. 31-41.

<sup>922</sup> P. Edwards, 'Womanizing Indochina: Fiction, Nation and Cohabitation in Colonial Cambodia, 1890-1930' in J. Clancy-Smith & F. Gouda (eds.), *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (1998), pp. 108-130.

## Conclusion

Scholars, such as Hall, Porter, Ward, Ageron, Blanchard or Girard, cited in this thesis<sup>923</sup> have presented differing takes on the impact of empire and its end on Britain and France. Most seem to agree though that the armed forces represented a special case because of their heavy involvement in empire-building and -defence. Yet few have had a closer look at what members of those institutions actually saw and lived through in colonies and protectorates. Even John MacKenzie has not so much analysed individual circumstances but rather the military's image in Britain.<sup>924</sup>

Andrew Thompson has not concentrated on the military either but his cautious reasoning is corroborated by the results of this thesis. I largely agree with his argument that the nuanced strands regarding imperial culture are down to differing understandings of the diverse evidence. 'Enthusiasm' and 'popular' are indeed problematical terms because they are too comprehensive, conceptual and vague. The impact of literature, film, art and entertainment on the metropolitan populace(s), including (future) servicemen does only reveal part of the picture. Thompson has rightly urged for a closer look at family life and work environments – in our case barracks and jungles – so as to understand the subtle and changing influence of empire on different groups.<sup>925</sup>

This project has shone some light on the British and French's armies' familiarity with empire as well as on their responses to Southeast Asia and its wars. Its findings are not necessarily clear-cut. While individual reactions could be rather pronounced, the sum of soldierly testimonies neither implies strong imperial awareness and affinity nor complete ignorance and indifference across the board. What they do illustrate are differing commemorative (and social) conventions in the British and French Army. They also highlight the importance of individual age, periods of service, circumstances and background when trying to understand military stances on empire and decolonisation.

Chapters one and two, complemented by appendices A to D, have therefore sketched the origins and make up of the anti-communist forces engaged in Southeast Asia, as far as that is feasible. In the British case demobilisation after WWII and National Service resulted in a force that had to adjust to new political realities in Malaya, i.e. the Cold War and decolonisation, as well as to a hitherto largely unknown environment. Habitually, young and imperially less conscious privates and subalterns were commanded and assisted by seasoned NCOs, many of whom had experienced other overseas postings, most notably in the Indian northwest. All that said, even among these old imperial soldiers very few were familiar with Malaya's pre-emergency history, its complex ethnic make-up or its testing climate and compact jungles. Over time various troops from colonies, including Malaya and Singapore, and the Dominions reinforced a force hitherto composed of British and Gurkha units.

The CEFEO, too, mostly consisted of men who had never set foot in Indochina prior to the conflict, with the majority originating from the *Armée Coloniale* and *d'Afrique*. They were assisted

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<sup>923</sup> See thesis introduction.

<sup>924</sup> MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism and the Military*.

<sup>925</sup> Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?*, 239-242.



by Foreign Legionnaires, (North) Africans, local irregulars and eventually the national armies of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. As a result, the French themselves became a minority among those fighting the Vietnamese communists. Metropolitan officers more familiar with Southeast Asia were often either ignored or sent back to France, as was the case with someone like General Sabattier. The army also brought in a limited number of younger and less travelled servicemen who could not add much local knowledge. But the majority of the men quoted in this thesis were officers (and a handful of NCOs<sup>926</sup>), whose well-written accounts betray educational levels well above those of ordinary French (and British).

Chapters three and four contain soldiers' views on insurgency and insurgents. In an attempt to explain those, the sections also lists possible influences on these opinions, such as the Japanese (quasi-) occupation of Southeast Asia and other, far-reaching developments during WWII. Other aspects include the general difficulty to recognise the dawn of empire, lack of proper briefings, coupled with official and often misleading propaganda, apolitical army education, public apathy, political elitism, the onset of the Cold War, the opposition faced in Southeast Asia and the eventual outcomes of the wars. These aspects help to explain why British soldiers focused on their task and largely accepted the official categorisation of the Malayan Emergency as a counter-insurgency effort against communist rebels.

Apart from that, the British military success in Malaya has led to fairly positive views on the counter-insurgency effort on the one hand and to dim views of the opposition on the other. A bi-product of these stances is that most (ex-)soldiers (have) found little reason to reflect on the potential economic, political and social pulls exerted on the MNLA's recruits, as outlined by Mackay. These included the traumatic events during WWII, the problematic rule of the BMA, infrastructural deficiencies, economic upheavals, political blunders and an aloof, colonial administration.<sup>927</sup> Among those more critical participants one notes particular functions, colonial ties preceding or outlasting the emergency or physical and emotional scars.

Vice versa, the experience of combating and ultimately being defeated by increasingly well-armed, disciplined and effective insurgents has undoubtedly shaped judgements of (former) French soldiers. In many cases initial contempt for and underestimation of the enemy gave way to a degree of admiration. As regards the conflict itself, military opinions have not in all cases followed the classic division of the war into an initially localised, colonial conflict turning into a Cold War theatre. In reality, French understandings of the clash and motivations to fight the Viet Minh ranged from a simple desire to do one's duty, attempts to revive careers, escape from difficult personal circumstances, rejection of totalitarianism and solidarity with local communities (opposed to communism) to a belief in a continued French role in Indochina, regardless of the conflict's stages.

In chapter five I have argued that British military recollections of Malayan land and people have not been overly plentiful and weighty. Instead, servicemen took a business-like approach to their

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<sup>926</sup> One must obviously draw a distinction between NCOs and officers. While NCOs have usually risen through the ranks, officers have tended to receive their commission after officer training. The promotion through the ranks up to fairly senior levels has been more common in France than in Britain.

<sup>927</sup> Mackay, *The Malayan Emergency*, pp. 11-7 (thesis chapter 3).

presence in Southeast Asia. One also searches largely in vain for connections between colonial representations gathered in Britain and reconnected with in Southeast Asia. Pronouncements on Britain's imperial record in Malaya have been similarly rare and where they surfaced, mainly positive. Recollections of local communities have been more frequent but often infused with stereotypes. Soldiers did not necessarily gather those labels in Britain but developed or accepted them from colleagues during their tours. On the other hand, the fraught relations with the expatriate community often resulted from sometimes very subtle demeanour on the latter's part. Failure to offer exhausted servicemen drinks was enough to tarnish planter's image to this day. Tensions had little to do with empire but much to do with domestic class divisions, which circuitously echoes Porter's claims.<sup>928</sup> All this leads one to suspect that there are limits as to the extent to which (former) servicemen (have) identified with the territory and its communities. Veterans would argue that their erstwhile attitudes cannot really surprise given their arduous chores, the frequently short tours, meagre pay and the need to guard a distance to communities. I have added to this the importance of age, lack of schooling and the limits of imperial culture in Britain.

In comparison, French (ex-)servicemen have passed on fairly complex testimonies, despite similar, and often greater, pressures and general unfamiliarity with Indochina. It is noticeable that at least a few of these contain evaluations of France's developmental performance. Recollections of human interactions particularly abound. They show clear preferences for the usually loyal minorities but reservations in regard to the Viet majority and expatriates. Soldiers' (newly) awakened interest in Indochina, the often fairly dynamic interactions with locals and the resulting attachment are remarkable, given the army's traditional preference for Africa and the limits of imperial stimuli in France. There are various reasons for the differing output, among them educational refinements, a larger and more heterogeneous, Indochinese environment, greater reliance on local troops and longer military tours in Indochina. It should also be acknowledged that the greater use of memoirs and official papers for the 'French' part of the research allowed for lengthier and more complex soldierly comments. Even so, they have still turned out to be more philosophical than comparable and more technical British accounts.

A distinct difference in perceptions of land and people lies in the interactions with women. The British military set a rather clear demarcation line when it came to such relations, thus indirectly encouraging prostitution. The French largely let nature take its course, even providing controlled environments. Perhaps this represents the most significant colonial legacy, both in Southeast Asia and France itself, where many children of mixed ethnicity have ended up.

In these last two chapters especially I have hinted that differing ideas have existed in the British and French military as regards politics, warfare, human interactions and individual responsibilities. At the risk of falling into stereotypes, it is my view that the British penchant for empiricism, pragmatism, specialisation, social restraint,<sup>929</sup> and humour accounts for the comparatively

<sup>928</sup> Porter, *The Absent-minded Imperialists*, 309 and 318.

<sup>929</sup> The anthropologist Kate Fox has humorously described this restraint as: "... our embarrassment, insularity, awkwardness, perverse obliqueness, emotional constipation, fear of intimacy and general inability to engage in a normal and straightforward fashion with other human beings." See K. Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (2004). P. 401. Note though that the author has not included the Welsh, Irish and Scots in her study. One also suspects that her assessment mostly applies to the English (upper) middle classes.

technical, unemotional yet often comical recollections. It explains why (ex-)soldiers have not described protagonists' character traits but their suitability for certain tasks or their political leanings. Equally, the appearance of cities, landscapes or wildlife have not shaped reminiscences. It has mattered more that certain sections were out of bounds, required particular approaches, and posed potential risks. Jokes at times appear to have concealed potentially sad and even shocking images.

To some degree one senses here a flickering of traditional British attitudes in regard to the colonised. Porter has held that little evidence existed "of any very profound acculturation" between the British and their subjects. Contrary to other colonising powers, they "exerted themselves to make sure they were *not* contaminated by other cultures [...]" It was part of the style of British imperialism that it kept its distance from its subjects and very much disapproved [of those] who did not. Acculturation in this direction was called 'going native'.<sup>930</sup> This explains why men like Lieutenant-Colonel John Cross or Roy Follows, who immersed themselves in aboriginal life, appear today as the odd men out. And it also illuminates why someone like Henry Hill strongly censured his French hosts' leisure activities in Indochina.<sup>931</sup>

Then again, soldiers' attitudes in Malaya might simply reflect the military's (re-gained) allergy to anything smacking of politics, as outlined by Strachan and MacKenzie.<sup>932</sup> Regardless of the underlying reasons, the focus on the task, hesitation to engage too much with locals and the disinclination to ponder unnecessarily on non-military aspects certainly helped to swallow the pill of decolonisation – provided the latter was actually seen as such. If it was all just about crushing a vicious opponent and/or guaranteeing the flow of tin and rubber, there was evidently little need for any emotional attachment.

These tendencies have contrasted with French traditions that might well be down to national characteristics. Pulitzer-price winning journalist, historian and biographer, Sanche de Gramont, has argued that the French possessed an "acquired reflex to think for oneself" and "a Cartesian attitude of systematic doubt [and] intellectual curiosity".<sup>933</sup> The Guardian's French Columnist Agnès Poirier for her part has highlighted the discrepancy between the British preference for compartmentalisation and expediency on the one hand and French insistence on the need for general knowledge and idealism on the other.<sup>934</sup> French veterans themselves have stressed that they actively sought interaction with locals, regardless of the inherent danger. The problem for them was that friendships with irregulars, liaisons with *con gai* and excursions to Angkor Wat impeded to some degree a focus on a knotty military situation. More importantly, it made the final rupture and abandonment of allies very painful.

<sup>930</sup> Porter, *The Lion's Share*, 356-7. For an in-depth analysis of these aspects see again Cooper and Stoler, *Tensions of Empire*.

<sup>931</sup> Thesis chapter 6.

<sup>932</sup> Chapter 3.

<sup>933</sup> S. de Gramont, *The French: Portrait of a People* (1969), p. 42. The author's real name was Comte St. Charles Armand Gabriel de Gramont who later became US citizen Ted Morgan. Son of a resistance hero, de Gramont/Morgan served as a subaltern in the Algerian War and has recently published *Valley of Death: The Tragedy of Dien Bien Phu that Led America into the Vietnam War* (2010).

<sup>934</sup> A. C. Poirier, *Le modèle anglais, une illusion française* (2006), pp. 37-44 and 87-93.

To some extent, the reflections above raise the question whether a more thorough examination and stronger memory of conflicts, territories and communities (have) resulted in a more profound imperial culture within the involved forces and their countries of origin during and after decolonisation. Solid answers would require a distinct study based on, among other things, interviews with soldiers' families and friends. Nevertheless, this thesis has emitted some indices worth contemplating. The films and documentaries cited in the introduction suggest that the experience of war has reverberated beyond military circles in France. In fact, former protagonists turned writers like Pierre Schoendoerffer, Jean Lacouture or Jules Roy have made sure that it has. Children of former servicemen (and opponents) have also played a role, as the examples of Régis Wargnier and Fleur Albert prove. The corresponding films/documentaries have done their bit in perpetuating and awakening a fascination with French Indochina that has touched younger generations. During my research I have also come across two websites created by veterans' offspring (or in-laws), one of them in reaction to a grand-daughter's school assignment. A quick survey among British and French friends of varying ages revealed in turn that the former had not picked up much about Britain's empire and wars of decolonisation in school or at home, despite relatives having lived and served in former colonies. The French asked are in most cases familiar with 'Greater France' or the Indochina and Algerian War to a varying degree. In one instance this owed to the person having been asked by her grandfather to type his memoirs.<sup>935</sup> In this context, I have also found it intriguing that curious French veterans approached me on several occasions while I was studying sources at archives and associations – something that never occurred in Britain. This at least implies that veterans (of the Indochina War) have in many cases willingly shared their experiences with their environment and that schools have incorporated these experiences into their curriculum. The ANAI for instance insisted that the Fréjus memorial include educational facets (which school classes have subsequently examined). Equally, its staff/members have eagerly responded to inquiries from students, researchers and teachers. By the same token, ANAI's website features lengthy background information on Indochina. That said, it needs to be remembered that many of these activities have emerged late and have contributed more to a post- than contemporary, imperial culture. Earlier voices were more isolated but they were voices nevertheless.

While the NMBVA has demonstrated a similarly cooperative spirit when dealing with researchers' requests, its outreach has never matched that of its French counterpart(s). To my knowledge, its board has not pressed for a memorial or a public place named after fallen comrades. Some veterans have sent their collected memorabilia to the not-very-aptly named Imperial War Museum but the latter has still devoted very little space to post-1945 conflicts. Regimental museums have generally done a better job. Yet they serve a smaller clientele, often consisting of soldiers' families. These tend to show up on special, regimental celebrations.

One could maintain that British veterans' fondness for recollecting patrols, skirmishes, ambushes, accidents, mess activities, sports and pranks within closed circles has unwittingly excluded a wider audience. Similarly, the rather technical testimonies, book lists and other

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<sup>935</sup>

E-mail correspondences in May 2010.

features on the NMBVA's website have done little to attract ordinary civilians. Family members in particular might have been very interested in the political, social and economic backdrop of the emergency. Yet during my research I gathered that my interviewees' spouses and children had usually not learned as much about their husbands' and fathers' tours as I did. As a matter of fact, ex-soldiers themselves have admitted that they have largely guarded their silence over the decades. In so doing they have unconsciously limited the amount of historic information on the empire their families and friends, as well as the wider population, could gather.

All that said, there are important parallels between the two sets of soldierly memories and experiences during the emergency and the Indochina War. To begin with, British and French troops fought alongside non-European forces against communist movements in the same region. This added an international touch to the conflicts and could have strengthened links not only within the two forces but also between them. In reality, only Australian and British veterans seem to have actively kept in touch, much of it owing to the very active Paddy Bacskai. Links between both sides of the Channel appear non-existent.

Moreover, the general lack of acquaintance with Southeast Asia made it difficult for most European soldiers to recognise local ethnicities, buildings or landscapes from photographs, films, paintings, picture books, exhibits or stories recounted by (emigrating or serving) relatives – provided it happened at all. Among newly gained impressions, humans exerted a stronger pull than nature and infrastructure with a clear preference for loyal collaborators. In this context one senses a certain paternalism – clothed in traditional protectionism – towards less developed groups, i.e. Malayan aborigines and Indochinese minorities. Relations with the most advanced group, expatriates, were often burdened. It underpinned the gap between colonies and mother countries, as well as professional soldiers' re-occurring dislike of modern societies.

Despite the departure of most European troops after the end of hostilities, the bulk of soldiers involved did not necessarily grasp that this constituted the end of empire in the area and soon in other parts, too. The accordance of independence to Malaya in 1957 probably concealed the fissure. Equally, the fact that Southern Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos (retaining a French garrison) remained communist-free in 1954 might have obscured the true extent of the war's outcome for France. Scholars still disagree over the exact point at which the British and French recognised that the imperial days were coming to an end. Undoubtedly though, Suez, not Malaya, highlighted both Britain's political and military limits, with the latter being partly imposed by old-fashioned colonial policing. As General Farrar-Hockley has pointed out: "It demonstrated the limitations of Britain's military capacity [and] was undertaken on the margin of capability."<sup>936</sup> In the case of France, Anthony Clayton has remarked that it took the Algerian War "before the lesson was finally learnt that social and nationalist challenges cannot be crushed by technical solutions."<sup>937</sup>

In regard to categorisations, even the interrogation of captured enemies at the time and the publication of memoirs by (former) communist insurgents after the wars do not appear to have impinged on soldierly recollections to a great degree. In part this has owed to the fact that most

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<sup>936</sup> Farrar-Hockley in Chandler & Beckett, *The Oxford History of the British Army*, 336-7.  
<sup>937</sup> Clayton, *The Wars of French Decolonization*, 76.

(former) European servicemen have wholeheartedly rejected communism, despite individual recognitions of colonial discrimination. The rejection and disregard has also been due to the often horrendous means employed by the rebels.

In view of such parallels, this thesis has indirectly made a humble case for more comparisons in (imperial) history. It has hopefully also demonstrated that it is well worth drawing on increasingly numerous online memoirs and media archives, as well as on oral testimonies. Most likely it will wield more results to engage with the decreasing number of witnesses, instead of studying media that might have possibly awakened their imperial senses. This is not to say that we should not pay attention to exhibits, paintings and music inspired by the colonies, as Martin Evans has.<sup>938</sup> But as he himself and like-minded scholars have admitted, the effect on the metropolitan population of such influences is rather difficult to gauge and tells only part of the story. An interview can fill many gaps – keeping in mind that recorded statements need to be compared with other sources. Put differently: we might as well ask surviving dock workers if they remember unloading African pineapples and pondering on their origins. The unsatisfactory alternative consists in assuming that they did on the basis of shipment lists at the time.

By the same token, it is worth exploring the frequently well-maintained but smaller collections held in local archives outside London. In view of veterans' strong attachments to their former units, personal diaries or unpublished memoirs habitually end up at regimental museums rather than the larger, urban archives. Further, it makes sense to continue the current trend of including more cultural, gender and social aspects into (imperial) history. Bayly's and Harper's *Forgotten Armies and Wars* represent excellent examples of how various angles can be interwoven to produce a very multi-faceted narrative. After all, sex, class, education and regional origins can heavily impact on how events are experienced. Such takes need to be contrasted with the traditional top-down approach of political history. Finally, I hope to have demonstrated that one can study military history without endlessly debating strategies, weaponry, logistics and battles.

This research has addressed questions of tradition, categorisation, identification, cross-cultural exchange, parallels and recollection that can be further explored. There are for instance the various Anglo-French-(American) conferences as well as mutual inspections and visits during the 1950s, which highlighted diverging assumptions and practices. The differing outcomes of the British and French counter-insurgency efforts also beg the question whether forces were/are better off focusing solely on the military task at hand and keeping a relative distance to civilians and politics. In other words: where does a soldier's job begin and where does it end? Many British veterans would probably maintain that their erstwhile detachment and single-mindedness accounted for the success in Malaya. Former French servicemen on the other hand might claim that their often close collaboration with and immersion into local communities kept them in the war for longer than might otherwise have been feasible. These takes should be further investigated based on other wars of decolonisation. British and French forces conducted more of these, few of which have been analysed in great depth from a soldier's perspective. The Suez campaign represents a logical continuation from this project as the Franco-British collaboration

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<sup>938</sup>

Thesis introduction.

highlighted differing attitudes towards empires, conflicts, politics and international law. The insurgencies in Palestine and Madagascar for their part contain various aspects that feed into and push the boundaries of imperial and military history.

Shifting away from purely military matters, climate and vegetation in Southeast Asia resulted in a multitude of medical problems among troops. At least one article exists in the French case, which deals with these issues. It contains intriguing comparisons between French and British traditions in regard to military-tropical medicine.<sup>939</sup> Australian researchers, too, have looked into this subject.<sup>940</sup> In comparison, little seems to have been done on the British armed forces during the final, imperial days.<sup>941</sup> In fact, staff at the Royal Army Medical Corp's regimental archive claimed not even to possess any records covering the Malayan Emergency. Yet when I asked veterans, almost all replied that they had suffered from some ailment or another. A study of their troubles could add interesting facets to the literature on colonial medicine<sup>942</sup> and the military during the imperial expansion and contraction.<sup>943</sup>

These directions illustrate that the role, outlook, conduct of and problems facing the military – whether British, French or other – during the imperial days still offer scope for research. Armed forces have always been more than just fighting machines. They have employed thousands of men and women from often very diverse backgrounds and equipped with specific thinking and behavioural patterns. Such personnel has been programmed for particular purposes based on certain national values. This has been especially pronounced in conscript armies, whose members have by definition been both soldiers and citizens. Whether conscript or regular, servicemen's and –women's stances, actions and the conflicts they have been involved in tell us much about shifting (national) conditions and conventions. For instance, large-scale battles pitching modern, European troops against medieval African armies, as occurring at Omdurman, would probably have made many more among the winners uneasy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than it did at the time. Vice versa, some of the more grizzly and controversial practices employed by Commonwealth and French Union troops during the Malayan Emergency and the Indochina War – i.e. cutting off heads for identification, torture and summary executions – were often accepted as necessary some decades earlier, as the Boxer Rebellion proved. Such cases can thus tell us more about the circumstances for instance, under which European powers were, or were no longer, prepared to hang on to empires.

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<sup>939</sup> SHD 1K 665.

<sup>940</sup> B. G. O'Keefe, *Medicine at War: Medical Aspects of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asia, 1950-1972* (1994).

<sup>941</sup> The political realm has been better served, for instance by S. S. Amrith's *Decolonizing International Health: India and Southeast Asia, 1930-65* (2006).

<sup>942</sup> One of the latest contribution in this field is A. Crozier's *Practicing Colonial Medicine: The Colonial Medical Service in British East Africa* (2007).

<sup>943</sup> A lonely work in this field is P. D. Curtin's *Disease and Empire: The Health of European Troops in the Conquest of Africa* (1998).

## Appendix A

Background information on British<sup>944</sup> soldiers/veterans quoted in the thesis

Note that this list does not include men who wished to remain anonymous. Equally, if too little could be found about a person's background he was also left out. It also needs to be kept in mind that available sources, particularly in regard to affiliations and postings in Malaya, can be vague and incomplete.

Name	Ranks and tasks in Malaya (and Singapore)	Units in Malaya (and Singapore)	Dates of tours in Malaya	Stationed/ operations in (mainly)	Life/career prior to emergency
Adams, John	Quartermaster (former signals officer)	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn South Wales Borderers	1955-8	Nee Soon, <sup>945</sup> Kota Tinggi (jungle training) <sup>946</sup> and Kluang, plus a short spell in Sandakan (Borneo)	Served with Parachute Regiment in the Canal Zone prior to the emergency.
Ashton Lofft Wade, Sir Douglas	Major-general/ general officer commanding	Headquarters Kuala Lumpur	1948	Based at KL but inspections and meetings all over the territory	Born in Saffron Walden in 1898. Commissioned into the Royal Artillery in 1916 following officer training. Seconded to the Royal Engineers from 1918 to 1921. Wounded at Ypres. Served out war in Italian Campaign and in Russia. Entered Cambridge in 1920 earning a first in engineering. Moved to Catterick Camp, base of the new Royal Signallers, to instruct officers. Worked for Royal Engineer and Signals Board before joining the Staff College in 1934. Staff appointments followed at GHQ India. Returned to Britain in 1940, then posted to France from where he was evacuated. Returned to India as administrative officer. Appointed major-general. Helped to prepare invasion of Malaya from 1944 on. After V-Day involved in the accommodation of returning POWs and internees. Served on the Indian Armed Forces Nationalisation Committee from 1946 on.
Ascherson, Neal	Royal Marine/2 <sup>nd</sup> lieutenant/ National Serviceman	42 Commando Royal Marines	151-2	Ipoh and Selangor	Father <sup>947</sup> had served in the navy. NA went through Royal Marine Volunteer Training for two years before being called up.
Atkins, Harold	(Eventually) regimental quartermaster sergeant	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment	1954-6	Behau, KL (HQ Malaya Command)	Born 1919 in Halifax (Canada). Father unknown. Stepfather served in the Royal Canadian Navy. Family eventually moved to England. HA grew up in Aldershot. Left school at 14. Started working as a milk boy. Spells in employment at Charterhouse and as a butcher boy. Joined Territorial Army in 1936 before enlisting with Queen's Royal West Surrey Regt. in 1937.

<sup>944</sup> The list includes one representative from Australia/Hungary and one from New Zealand.

<sup>945</sup> Transit camp many servicemen passed through.

<sup>946</sup> Most infantrymen and their commanders, up to the rank of captain, went through jungle training from the early 1950s on. The location and training rarely crop up in sources though.

<sup>947</sup> Unless specifically mentioned mothers were housewives.



					Served in Palestine, N. Africa, Syria, Ceylon, India and Burma during WWII. Stationed in Berlin during the blockade (1948 and 1950). Attended Sandhurst between 1950 and 1953. Returned to the battalion in the UK until tour in Malaya.
Bacsikai, Arpad	Private but at times acting as section commander	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn (28th Commonwealth Brigade) and 6 <sup>th</sup> Bn Royal Australian Regiment/SASR (seconded to 1/3 <sup>rd</sup> East Anglia Rgt., 42 Cdo, Federation Army & 17th Gurkha)	1959-1961	Kuala Kangsar and Perak	Born 1940 in Szekesfehervar (Hungary). Father was a teacher serving as an officer in WWII until wounded. AB had to flee advancing Soviet troops in 1944 but ended up in Austrian work camp. Held as a displaced person in Austria and Germany. But eventually sent to Australia by UN agencies after the war. Arrived in Australia in 1950 becoming a citizen seven years later. Attended convent school. Became a shop assistant and later a store clerk in Perth before entering the army in 1957. Joined the Royal Australian Regiment/SAS after basic training.
Banks, Douglas	Adjutant/captain	Royal Sussex Regiment (short commission) and 1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Malay Regiment	1952-3	Port Dickson, Triang (Pahang)	Born 1913 in Seaford (Sussex). Served with Royal Engineers in France in 1940 before evacuation. Took over from the Japanese in Java with the Indian Corps Provost Unit between 1945-6.
Bell, John	Captain	13/18 <sup>th</sup> Hussars	1950-1 and 1959-61	Johore and Singapore	Born 1924 in Scotland. Father was a sailor in the Royal Navy. Attended secondary school. Joined army at 18 in 1942, volunteering for Young Soldier Regiment. Also attended Winchester College and Sandhurst. Commissioned into Lothian and Border Horse Yeomanry. Service in Northwest Europe between 1944-5.
Birks, Alexander	Subaltern (2 <sup>nd</sup> lieutenant)/platoon commander	3 Company RASC	Early 1960s	Taiping, Ipoh and Malacca	Born 1939 in Manchester. Father was a textile merchant. Attended grammar school before being called up in 1960. Trained as officer cadet and commissioned into the Royal Army Service Corps.
Blake, Derek	Lance corporal (initially reverting to private before becoming a corporal again)	Royal Military Police and 1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Royal West Kent Regiment	1950-2	Singapore and Kuala Kubu Bahru/Selangor	Born 1932 in Peckham (London). Father was a carpenter. DB attended a grammar school which he left at 16. Began to work at the accounting department of a builder's merchant. Called up for National Service in October 1950.
Bonner, Robert	Lieutenant	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn the Manchester Regiment	June 1951-May 1954	Penang, Kedah, Perak and Cameron Highlands	Commissioned into the Manchester Regiment in 1948 after attending Sandhurst. Served in Germany prior to emergency.
Booth, R.	Captain/platoon commander	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn the West Yorkshire Regt.	Approx. 1948-1951	Cameron Highlands, Fraser's Hill, Tasik Bera (Pahang), Segamat, North Johore, Singapore and Malacca (rest)	n/a
Boucher, Sir Charles	Major-general/	HQ KL	1948-50	Based at KL (but inspections and meetings all	Born 1898 near Canterbury as son of a lieutenant-colonel. Attended Wellington College before being

	General Officer Commanding			over the territory)	commissioned into Gurkha Rifles. Served in WWI. Fought Northwestern campaigns before turning instructor at the Staff College (both in India). Served in Iraq, Libya (where he was captured), Italy and Greece. Became commander of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Indian Airborne Division after WWII.
Bower, Sir Roger	Lieutenant-general/ director of operations	6 <sup>th</sup> Air-landing Brigade and HQ	1945 and 1956-7 (director of operations)	Initially Hogla and later based in KL	Born 1903. Educated at Repton Preparatory (public) School and Sandhurst. Served in India and Hong Kong with Staff College in between. Saw action in Norway and Palestine during WWII. Commander of Hamburg, followed by appointments at the War Office and as director of training before becoming director of operations of the Allied Land Forces in Northern Europe.
Briggs, Sir Harold	Lieutenant-general/ director of operations	HQ KL	1950-1	Based at KL	Born in Broadstone (Dorset) in 1894. (No military background in family.) Attended Bedford College and Sandhurst. Commissioned into King's Regiment. Served in Punjab before being engaged in France, Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Palestine during WWI. Spell on Indian Northwest Border (Waziristan) followed. Served in Eritrea, the Western Desert, Iraq and Burma during WWII. Assumed Burma Command after its end.
Broome, Richard	Colonel/ Chinese Affairs	British Military Admin. & Foreign Office	1945-58	Singapore and Ipoh	Worked in Malayan Civil Service before Japanese attack. Joined Force 136 in Malaya but forced to leave peninsula. Escaped to Ceylon via Sumatra. Trained in India. Secret return to Malaya in 1943. Met up with Spencer Chapman and cooperated with MPAJA. Returned to Ceylon before the end of the war.
Burdett, Frank	Private	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn New Zealand Regiment	1957-9	Perak to Kelantan	Born 1931 in Auckland (New Zealand). Did an apprenticeship as a linotype operator after schooling. Signed up with the army voluntarily.
Campbell, Arthur	Major	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn the Suffolk Regiment	1950-2	Kajang, Broga, Port Dickson (leave) and KL	n/a
Calvert, Michael	Brigadier/ commander	22 <sup>nd</sup> SAS (Malayan Scouts)	1950-1	Johore, Dusun Tua and Perak a.o.	Born 1913 in Rohtak (India) as the son of the ev. governor of Punjab. Educated at Bradfield. Entered Royal Military Academy at Woolwich in 1931. Commissioned into Royal Engineers in 1933. Read mechanical sciences at Cambridge for one year. Posted to Hong Kong, then Shanghai where he witnessed the Japanese attack and occupation in 1937. At the outbreak of WWII he volunteered for the Scots Guards preparing to assist the Finns. Later became a member of the commando training schools in the highlands and in Australia to prepare stay-behind parties. There he met Chapman. Set up a bush warfare school in Burma where he was surprised by the Japanese attack. After meeting Wingate he participated in

					the Chindit expeditions during 1943-4. Became commander of the SAS Brigade operating in NW Europe. Served with Royal Engineers in India in 1947. Attended Staff College in Camberley (GB) between 1947 and 1948. Cooperated as staff officer with Italo-Yougoslav Boundary Commission in Trieste from 1948 to 1949. Served as staff officer (GI Air) in Hong Kong until 1950.
Chynoweth, John	Officer/ subaltern/ National Serviceman	6 <sup>th</sup> Bn the Malay Regiment	1953-4	Port Dickson, Lipis, Kelau, KL, Fraser's Hill (leave), Sungai Kerupan, Sungai Ketir, Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Penang, Triang, Temerloh and Mentakab (re- training)	Born 1931. Finished his studies at LSE before starting his National Service in 1952. Commissioned into the Malay Regiment due to an overcapacity of subalterns in his chosen county regiment.
Clutterbuck, Richard	Lieutenant- colonel	Director of operation's staff but also on patrols	1956-8	Mainly KL	Born 1917. Father was a colonel. RC graduated from the Royal Military Academy (Woolwich) and Cambridge where he had studied mechanical sciences. Commissioned into the Royal Engineers in 1937. Served in France, Sudan, Ethiopia, the Western Desert and Italy during WWII. Captain after the war when he was posted to Trieste, Palestine and Germany.
Crawford, Oliver	Subaltern/ platoon commander/ National Serviceman	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Somerset Light Infantry (but also commanding men from the Durham Light Infantry)	(Probably 1954) to January 1955 (repatriate d early due to rheumatic fever)	Wardieburn Camp (KL), Ampang (Selangor), Kota Tinggi (Jungle Warfare School), Singapore (leave), Johore, Kuala Selangor, Kinrara (Military Hospital) and Cameron Highlands (convalescence)	Called up for National Service. Went through Officer Cadet Training School at Eaton Hall.
Cross, John	Lieutenant- colonel/ company commander	1/7 <sup>th</sup> Bn Gurkha Rifles (Border Scouts)	1948-60	Sepang and border to Siam/Thailand a.o.	Deputy recruiting officer in Nepal in 1944. Was stationed in Laos after Japanese surrender in 1945. Experienced decolonisation in India and Burma. Also had a short spell in Indochina following D-Day.
Elkington, Archibald	Platoon and company commander	RASC	1950-3, 1957-60 and 1963-6 (partly in Borneo)	KL, Port Dickson, Taiping, Tawau and Saba (latter two in Borneo)	Born 1929 in Bruton (Somerset) as son of doctor. Attended Malvern College until 17 before going through officer training from 1946 to 1949. Also took Russian language course.
Evill, Adrian	Officer/ company commander	3 <sup>rd</sup> Bn King's African Rifles (KAR)	1952-3	Kota Tinggi, Trengganu, Triang railway and Chukai (leave)	n/a
Follows, Roy	Platoon and jungle fort commander	Malaya Police (Field Force)	May 1952- October 1960	North, south and coastal area of Johore and Fort	Born 1929 in North Staffordshire. Left school at 14 to begin an apprenticeship as a fitter at the locomotive works in Crewe. Did

				Brooke (Kelantan)	National Service with REME. Joined Ellerman Lines as a junior engineer to see the world. Quit engineering college in Liverpool upon discovering an ad for the Malaysian Police.
Franklin, Peter	Trooper/ national serviceman	11 <sup>th</sup> Hussars	June 1955- August 1956	Seremban and Johore Baru	Born 1933 in Bishop Auckland (Durham) as son of a coal miner. Attended secondary school. Called up in 1955 and trained as a clerk.
Gibbs, I.	Lieutenant/ platoon commander	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn the Seaforth Highlanders	Ca. 1947 until probably 1950	Tanjong Rambutan (Trengganu) and Singapore	Joined the army in 1944. Selected for Officer Cadet Training Unit after basic training. Commissioned in 1945. Served in Burma, India and Indonesia.
Gibson, George	Sapper, eventually attaining the rank of NCO	Malayan Engineer Regiment	June 1950- April 1953 (with approx. one-year spell in Hong Kong)	Batu caves and KL	Born in 1929 in Hendon (Sunderland) as son of a shipyard worker and printer. Attended Hendon Boys' School. Called up in 1947. Assigned to 4 <sup>th</sup> Field Squadron RE in Germany before tour in Malaya. Signed on after National Service.
Guest, Ernest	Private/ rifleman/ pay clerk	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Suffolk Regiment	December 1950-June 1952	KL, Kajang Dinkel and Kuala Kubu Bahru	Born 1932. Father was a thatcher. Attended grammar school and was trained in engineering. Called up in 1950.
Haley, Terence	Infantryman/ private/ National Serviceman	1 <sup>st</sup> West Yorkshire Regiment	1953-5	Ipoh, Batu Gajah, Kampar and Cameron Highlands	Born 1932 in Leeds to a foreman engineer and a weaver/housewife. TH attended a council school but left at 14 to begin an apprenticeship as painter and decorator. Well over twenty when he was called up.
Hall, Robert	Transport driver (regular)	REME	September 1953- March 1956	Taiping, Mentakab and Bentong	Born in 1935 as son of a miner. (Latter was killed during the Norway campaign in 1940.) RH attended primary and grammar school until 1950. Joined the army three years later.
Halliday, Peter	Major/ company commander	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Royal Hampshire Regiment	Arrived approx. January 1954 and left about one year later	Kota Tinggi (Jungle Warfare School), Bentong, Triang and North Pahang	n/a
Hamilton, Tony	Private/ Infantryman/ National Serviceman	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn The Royal Hampshire Regiment	September 1954- March 1956	Bentong, Kuala Kubu Baru and Kluang (Johore)	Born 1936 in Southampton. Father was a smallholder and had gardening/green grocer business. TH left Church of England school at 15 to work for his father until call-up.
Hamilton, Tony	Private/ Infantryman/ National Serviceman	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn The Royal Hampshire Regiment	September 1954- March 1956	Bentong, Kuala Kubu Baru and Kluang (Johore)	Born 1936 in Southampton. Father was a smallholder and had a gardening/green grocer business. TH left Church of England school at 15 to work for his father until call-up.
Harding, Sir Allan	Commander-in-chief Far East Land Forces (FARELF)	HQ	1949-51	Singapore, KL, (Borneo and Sarawak as well as Hong Kong, Saigon and Hanoi)	Born 1896 in South Petherton (Somerset). Attended Ilminster Grammar School and King's College London. Left university to join Territorial Army in 1914. Got commissioned into the London Regiment in 1914. Served in Gallipoli, Egypt, Palestine and India from 1914-21 with London Regiment and Machine Gun Corps/Bn/Coys. Switched to Somerset Light Infantry touring India, Sudan and GB until 1928. Attended Staff College

					(Camberley) until 1931. Staff officer in headquarters of 13 <sup>th</sup> Brigade in GB and Germany from 1933-5. Switched to the War Office where he stayed until 1938. Took up command of 1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Somerset Light Infantry in India between 1939 and 1940. Staff officer, Deputy Chief of Staff, Director of Military Training and commander of 7 <sup>th</sup> Armoured Division North Africa & ME from 1941-3. Commanded VIII Corps in GB in 1943. Chief of Staff to General Alexander with 15 <sup>th</sup> Army in Italy, 1943-5. Commanded XIII Corps in Italy and Central Mediterranean Force in 1945-6. Oversaw Southern Command in GB between 1947 and 1949.
Harper, William	Private/ National Serviceman	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Royal West Kent Regiment	1952-3	Kuala Kubu (Bahru) (training) plus jungle camps	Born 1933 in Deptford. Called up in 1951. Trained originally with the Royal Army Pay Corps.
Hart, Lemon	Staff and intelligence officer/ squadron commander	21 <sup>st</sup> SAS and GI intelligence	1952-6	Headquarters (KL) and Kelantan-Perak border but also visiting various locations	Born in Dormansland (Surrey). Father was a solicitor in London. LH attended a preparatory school. Became a solicitor himself in father's firm in the 1930s. Joined the military when WWII started. Served as staff officer in the SAS Brigade in GB, NW Europe and Norway in 1944-5. Also liaised with SOE. Re-joined SAS in 1947.
Henniker, Sir Mark	Brigadier	63 <sup>rd</sup> Gurkha Infantry Brigade	1952-5	Singapore, Seramban (Negri Sembilan) and Selangor/KL	Educated at Marlborough College, the Royal Military Academy (Woolwich) and Cambridge. Commissioned into the Royal Artillery Corps in 1926. Distinguished himself on the Indian NW frontier during the 1930s. Served in France with the British Expeditionary Force narrowly escaping from Dunkirk. Later carried out raids on Norway and Italy with 1 <sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, which he helped to evacuate from Arnhem. Commanded an Anglo-Indian engineer regiment in India during partition.
Hewlett, William	Private	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment	1954-6	n/a	n/a
Hill, Raymond	Marine/leading scout/bren gunner	42 Commando Royal Marines	April 1950- August 1952	Batu Gajah and Jelepang (Perak)	Born 1932 in Melton (East Yorkshire) as son of a coach driver and a house maid. Attended council school before becoming a farm worker. Joined Royal Marines in 1949 as a regular.
Horner, Edward	NCO/marine	42 Commando Royal Marines	1948-50	Penang, Ipoh and Batu Gajah	Born 1920 in Battersea. Father was a steel worker. EH left school at 14 to work as an errand boy. Went into glazing between 1937 and 1938. Enlisted with Royal Marines in 1938. On HMS Calypso in British coastal waters and Mediterranean in 1939-40. Shore duties in Egypt and Ceylon followed. As NCO in Royal Marine Boom Detachment in GB from 1942 to 1943. Posting to ME and raids on Greece between 1943 and 1945.

Horton, Norman	Sergeant/ signaler	545 Signals Troop (part of 99 Gurkha Infantry Brigade)	May- October 1966	Serian (Sarawak)	Born 1937. Grew up in Walsall (Staffordshire). Father served in WWII while the rest of the family ran a pub. NH enlisted at Army Apprentice School at 15 until becoming a regular soldier at 18. Had a posting in Hong Kong prior to tour in Borneo.
Howes, Roland	Rifleman/ private/ National Serviceman	King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI)	July 1949- July 1950	Kedah and Ipoh	Born 1930 in Stockton-on-Tees (Durham). Father was a labourer. RH left school at 14 to work as a fireman in railway. Called up in 1949.
Hudson, Frederick	National Serviceman and eventually corporal	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Loyal North Lancashire Regiment	January 1958-June 1959 (with a short spell in Hong Kong)	Ipoh (main base) and Perak valley	Born 1936 in Kirkham (Lancashire). Father owned a construction business. On leaving grammar school FH began an apprenticeship in his father's company until the age of 21 when he was called up. Shortly before starting his National Service he got married.
Ives, Leslie	Rifleman/ private/ National Serviceman	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn The Green Howard Regiment	1949-1951	Bentong, Port Dickson (leave), South Johol (rubber estate), Selerang (barracks) and Singapore	Born in London but brought up by his grandparents in Sheffield. Left school at 14 to work as a trainee at a large department store. Called up at 18.
Jones, Michael	Officer/ company commander/ staff officer (for training)	1/2 <sup>nd</sup> Gurkha Rifles	1948-9 (also present during Borneo confrontati on but without taking part)	Singapore, Johore (Bahru), Kota Tinggi (Jungle Warfare School), KL and Seremban	Born 1919 in India. Father was an officer with the Gurkha Rifles. Moved to South Africa after re-organisation of Indian Army to a farm. Returned to Britain when MJ was 10. Latter attended preparatory school in Staffordshire. Entered Sandhurst in 1938. Commissioned into same regiment as father. Served in India between 1939-40. With the Gurkha Rifles in India, Middle East and North Africa until 1943. Returned to India where he witnessed partition.
(Kemp) Bourne, Sir Geoffrey	Lieutenant- general/ director of operations/ GOC	HQ KL	1954-6	Based at KL	Born in 1902. Father was a colonel. JKB was educated at Rugby. Attended Royal Military Academy at Woolwich and was commissioned into the Royal Artillery. Postings in Hong Kong and Gibraltar before entering Staff College. Joined the War Office. Commanded 5 <sup>th</sup> Indian Division during WWII. Had postings in Java and India after the war before becoming Head of the British Mission to Burma. General Officer in Command in Berlin, then of Airborne Division and Eastern Command.
Kirk, Harold	Trooper (trained as gunner and crewman)	8 <sup>th</sup> K.R.I. Hussars and 4 <sup>th</sup> Q. O. Hussars	1948-1951	Ipoh	Born 1926 in Lincolnshire. Came from a farming background. Finished elementary school. Joined army in 1947.
Leek, Dennis	Driver, eventually becoming a sergeant	27 Motor Transport Coy RASC	1950-1952	Sungie Patani, Batu Gaja, Ipoh, Tapah, Taiping, KL and Singapore	Born 1929 in Penkridge (Staffordshire). Father worked in railway sector as a plate layer. DL attended Penkridge Boys School. Entered army as a 17-year old for regular service.
Leese, Kenneth	Commanding officer of Air Dispatch Company (Coy)	RASC	1950s (no exact dates given)	Singapore, Nee Soon and Fraser Hill (leave)	Born 1915. Father was a colonel. KL attended Ampleforth College before entering Sandhurst in 1934. Served with Suffolk Regiment in GB and India 1936-1940. Stationed in GB between 1940 and 1944. Switched to RASC to

					serve in North West Europe until the end of WWII. Stationed in Germany after the war.
Leigh, Peter	2 <sup>nd</sup> lieutenant rising to full lieutenant/platoon commander/intelligence officer	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment	February 1951-February 1954	K. K. Bahru, K.L., Rawang, Kerling and Trolak (Slim River)	Born in Bury (Lancashire) in 1930 as son of an officer. Attended a public school. Called up in 1948 eventually receiving a commission. Signed up for regular service and joined a tank regiment. Got regular commission. Went to Aldershot and later to Sandhurst.
Lloyd, Brian	Telephone operator/National Serviceman (RAF)	Private Branch Exchange	January 1954-October 1954	Changi Camp (Singapore) and KL	Born 1935 in Hayes (Middlesex). Father was a toolmaker. BL attended a private, secondary school until 15 when he began working as an office boy for Lloyd's. Entered RAF for National Service in 1953.
Longbon, Philip	n/a	Devonshire Regiment	1947-1949	n/a	n/a
Maule-Ffinch, Peter	NCO, police officer and assistant plantation manager	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Royal West Kent Regiment	1951 (army) 1952-5 (Fed. of Malaya Police) 1955-1968 (manager)	Kuala Kubu Baru, Nee Soon (training), south Selangor, south Kedah (with police), KL and Perak (as manager)	Father educated in Singapore and Malaya. Grandparents had lived in Malaya in the 1920s.
McGregor MacDonald Lockhart, Sir Robert	General/deputy director of operations	Headquarters KL	1952	Based at KL	Born 1893. Served in India throughout WWII rising to commander-in-chief of the Indian Army in 1947.
Miers, Richard	Colonel/battalion commander	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn the South Wales Borderers	1955-8	Kota Tinggi (Jungle Warfare School), Kluang, Johore Bahru, Segamat and Singapore	Joined the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Bn South Wales Borderers, which his father had already commanded, in Catterick, directly after graduating as a 2 <sup>nd</sup> lieutenant from Sandhurst in 1933. Posted with the 1 <sup>st</sup> Bn to Hong Kong in 1934 and from there to India. Left in 1936 to join the KAR in East Africa. Various staff and command jobs following the outbreak of WWII. Campaigns included Abyssinia and Burma. Accepted several staff appointments after the war.
Napier, Crookenden	Chairman of Combined Emergency Planning Staff (CEPS) in the Director of Operations HQ (KL)	HQ Kuala Lumpur	1952-4	KL but visited many other areas	Born 1915 in Upton (Cheshire). Father was a major serving in WWI. CN attended Wellington College. Operated as a subaltern with the Cheshire Regiment in Palestine 1936-7. Served as staff officer with Air-landing Brigade in the Normandy. Commanded Parachute Regiment in Northwest Europe in 1944-5 and in Palestine in 1946.
(Pasfield) Oliver, Sir William	Major-general, principal staff officer	HQ KL	1953-4	Based at KL but inspections and meetings all over the territory	Born 1901 to a navy captain and a general's daughter. Educated at Radley College and Sandhurst. Served as chief of general staff at GHQ Middle East between 1945 and 1946. Became a major-general in 1949. Acted as chief army instructor at the Imperial Defence College until 1950. Served as chief of staff Eastern Command from 1951 to 1952.

Parkes, Geoff	Quartermaster sergeant	Gurkha Independent Infantry Brigade/air dispatch/field ambulance	1950s	Singapore, Kota Tinggi, Selangor, Johore Bahru, KL, Ipoh, Batu Pahat and Kuantan	Born 1934 in Birmingham as son of a bus driver. Finished secondary school. Entered army in 1951.
Pullen, Harrold	Officer	1911 Flight, Army Air Corps	1955-6	Benta (Kuala Lipis), Singapore and Kluang	Born 1928 in Broome (Norfolk). Family owned a small brewery. HP attended a grammar school. Participated in the Home Guard in Bungay (GB) between 1940 and 1944. Joined army in 1946 with the goal to go to India. But given latter's independence commissioned into Royal Norfolk Regiment in 1948. Stationed in Germany between 1949 and 1950. Fought in Korea from 1951 to 1952.
Rodgers, Tony	Private/Infantryman/National Serviceman	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Suffolk Regiment	May 1951-December 1952	Kajang (HQ)/Selangor	Born 1932 in Kentish Town (London). Father was a house painter. Forced to move out of the city during the Blitz. Settled down in Hemel Hempstead. Left school at 14 to work at a local paper and printing factory. Switched to local cinema where he worked as a projectionist until call-up.
Ryan, Dennis	Private/signaller	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Suffolk Regiment	1950-2	Penang Island, KL & Kajang (Selangor), Sapang, Broga, Banting and Port Dickson (rest)	Born 1932 in Harlow (Essex). Called up in 1950.
Saunders, George	Trooper, assistant superintendent, then commander (police) and financial advisor to the sultan of Pahang	21 <sup>st</sup> SAS	1951 (SAS) 1951-4 (Fed. of Malaya Police) 1954-7 (Malayan Civil Service)	KL, Changi and deep jungle operations in unmentioned areas, Johore (with police) and Pahang (as advisor)	Of German origin but fought on allied side during WWII. Demobbed as a sergeant. Worked in commerce in Hong Kong and later as a schoolmaster at Gordonstown between 1945 and 1950. Re-joined SAS after its rebirth, initially organising ski trainings in Austria.
Short, Anthony	Probably subaltern	n/a	1948-1949/50	Johore	Born in Singapore around 1930. Was doing his National Service when the emergency broke out.
Sleeth, David	Sapper. Eventually became NCO for two years.	R. E. Works Squadron	1950-3	KL (main base) but worked in other areas	Born 1928. Father worked as coal miner. DS stopped education after elementary school. Joined the army in 1949 to train as a sapper with the Royal Engineers.
Spicer, Leonard	Private, later corporal. Transferred to intelligence section.	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn Suffolk Regiment, 1/7 Gurkha Rifles and intelligence section	June 1950-February 1952	Labis Segamat (Johore), Penang, Kajang, Selangor, Sepang, Dingkil, Broga and KL	Born 1931 in Hackney. Father was a ships purser and master butcher. LS left school at 14 to work in the research laboratory of a large paint company. Attended evening classes to obtain job-specific qualifications. Called up in 1949. Initially joined Essex Regiment.
Stevens, Ron	Corporal rising to sergeant	27 Coy RASC	September 1949-May 1952	Taiping (Perak) (Operational area ranged from Fraser's Hill to Thai border)	Born early 1920s. Entered the army in 1939 for an army apprenticeship. Served in France during WWII and in Germany from 1944-7. Spell in Hong Kong prior to tour in Malaya.
Stockwell, Sir Hugh	Major-general/general officer in command	HQ	1953	Based at KL	Born 1903 in Jersey to a lieutenant-colonel. Childhood in India but education at Marlborough College and Sandhurst. Commissioned into Royal



					Welsh Fusiliers. Garrisons in England and Germany before joining the Royal West African Frontier Force. Served in Norway, Madagascar, Arakan and Burma and as commander of Special Forces Training during WWII. Became commander of 82 <sup>nd</sup> West Africa Division in Burma and Palestine before being appointed head of Sandhurst.
Tee, William	Officer/chief instructor at Jungle Warfare School/second in command at depot	Intermittently with 1/10 Gurkha Rifles	1948-51 (1963 in Borneo during clash with Indonesia)	Johore Bahru and Sungai Patani (later also in Borneo)	Born 1920 in Indian Central Provinces. Father was an officer in the Royal Irish Rifles/Machine Gun Corps. WT attended Stonehurst College, leaving at 16 to work with WH Smith. Entered Sandhurst at the outbreak of WWII. Served with Gurkha Rifles in India from 1939-44 and until 1945 in Burma. Returned to India until independence.
Templer, Sir Gerald	General/director of operations	HQ	1952-4	Based at KL	Born 1898 in Colchester (Essex) as son of a lieutenant-colonel. Went through private schools in Edinburgh & Weymouth before entering Wellington College and later Sandhurst. Commissioned into the Royal Irish Fusiliers. After service in France during WWI postings in Persia, Iraq and Egypt. Attended Staff College. Participated in the submission of the Arab revolt in Palestine. Spell at the War Office (military intelligence). Participated in the French, North African and the Italian campaigns during WWII. Entered SOE after recuperation from wounds sustained. Served as director of civil affairs in Germany under Montgomery after the war.
Thomas, Leslie	Rose to lance-corporal/ National Serviceman	n/a (possibly REME)	Approx. 1949-51	Singapore	Born 1931 in Newport (Monmouthshire). Father was a sailor who died at sea in 1943. LT was educated at St. Bernardo's, Kingston-Upon-Thames, Kingston Technical School and SW Essex Technical College, Walthamstow. Worked for local newspapers in the London area between 1948 and 1949 before doing his National Service.
Thompson, Sir Robert	Staff officer (civil) to the director of operations (1950), co-ordinating officer security (1955), dept. secretary for defence, Federation of Malaya (1957), permanent secretary for defence (1959-61)	Director of operations' staff and cabinet	1950-61	Mainly KL	Born 1916. Educated at Marlborough College and Cambridge. Worked in the Malayan Civil Service from 1938 until the start of WWII. Served with the RAF from 1941-6. Returned to Malaya to become assistant commissioner of Labour in Perak in 1946.

Tullis, George	Driver/mechanic/corporal	3 Coy RASC/2nd Guard Brigade	End of 1948-October 1951	KL, Cameron Highlands and transport trips to various camps & bases	Born 1927 in Kirkcaldy (Scotland) as son of a linoleum worker. Taken out of school at 14 to work in a local garage. Began an apprenticeship as a fitter in a public service vehicle company. But didn't finish and enlisted in 1945 instead. Started army training in 1946 becoming a vehicle mechanic in the RASC. Initial posting to London.
Urquhart, Sir Robert	Major-general/general officer in command	HQ	1952	Based at KL	Born 1901. Father was a doctor. RU attended Sandhurst and the Staff College before being posted to India and North Africa. Stations during WWII included Malta, Sicily and Italy. Commanded the Airborne Division landing in the ill-fated Arnheim offensive. Became director of the Territorial Army and Army Cadet Force after the war.
Veys, John	Subaltern/National Serviceman	The West Yorkshire Regiment	November 1952-March 1954	Kota Tinggi, Johore (Jungle Warfare School) and Ipoh (HQ)	Born 1932 in Antwerp (Belgium). Father, an engineer, helped to start up a wire mill in Sheffield in 1935. JV attended a public school and a Jesuit Order for eight years before studying medicine. But gave latter up after one year.
Walker, Sir Walter	Colonel rising to brigadier/commander FARELF Training Centre (later Jungle Warfare School)	1/6 Gurkhas and 99 Gurkha Brigade	1948-1959	Kota Tinggi and Singapore a.o.	Born 1912 in India as son of a tea planter and soldier. Attended Blundell's School (Somerset) and later Sandhurst. Commissioned into a Gurkha unit his grandfather had already commanded. Operated in Waziristan in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Distinguished himself during the Burma campaign. Ended the war with a short spell at GHQ Delhi.
Williams, Humphrey	Colonel	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn KAR	1952-63	Kota Tinggi (training) and Bentong	Drawn towards Africa from an early age, partly because his mother was South African. Seconded to 1 <sup>st</sup> Bn KAR in Nyasaland in 1931. Served in Tanganyika during 1933-44. Posted to India until independence. Returned to Britain before new posting with 1 <sup>st</sup> Bn KAR in N. Rhodesia in 1952.
White, Josh	Private/National Serviceman	1 <sup>st</sup> Bn the King's Own Scottish Borderers	Aug. 1955-Aug. 1958	Batu Pahat (S. Johore) and Singapore	n/a
Wright, David	Lieutenant/gunner (but also jungle patrols in Malaya)	54 Makaspore Battery and 25 <sup>th</sup> Field Regiment Royal Artillery	Feb. 1950-May 1951	Johore Bahru (training) and Tampin/Nagri Sembelan (permanent base)	Born 1928 in Bottesford (Leicestershire). Father was a regular soldier and farmer. DW attended Trent College from 1941 to 1946. Entered the army shortly after graduation. Went through infantry and artillery training before receiving a commission. Originally assigned to 25 <sup>th</sup> Field Regiment Royal Artillery.

Sources: Questionnaires, interviews (own and Imperial War Museum), memoirs, biographies, private papers of Colonel Halliday, Captain Robert Bonner, Liz Grant, Celia Green (all three working at regimental museums and providing information by e-mail), obituaries in the online archives of *The Times*, *The Independent* and *The Daily Telegraph*, H. Matthew & B. Harrison, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 52 (2004), pp. 836-7 and vol. 54 (2004), pp. 99-100, *Who Was Who*, vol. V, 1951-60 (1964), pp. 120-1, 135-6, vol. VIII, 1981-90 (1991), pp. 80, 82, 567 and 772 and vol. IX, 1991-5 (1996), p. 550, Short, *In Pursuit of Mountain Rats*, inside cover, Walker, *Six Campaigns*, 1-7 and 35-40, www.britains-smallwars.com and www.remuseum.org.uk.

## Appendix B

Background information on (former) members of the CEFEO<sup>948</sup> cited in the thesis

Note: This list does not cover all French (and related) protagonists quoted in this thesis. It is practically impossible to gather background information on the various lesser known people featuring in the documentaries, printed collections and articles. Equally, the column, which lists postings of individuals in Indochina, is not complete as the sources do not mention all locations.

Name	Rank(s)/ task(s) in Indochina	Unit(s) in Indochina	Dates of tour(s) in Indochina	Stationed /operations in (mainly)	Life/career prior to the Indochina War
Alessandri, Marcel	Commissioner/ president of the Dalat Conference/ <i>commandant supérieur</i> / military advisor to the Vietnamese government	Headquarters/ land forces and forces in N. Vietnam	October 1945 August 1946 September 1949- November 1950 1952-5	Cambodia and Dalat. Later based in Hanoi	Born 1895. Graduated from St. Cyr. <sup>949</sup> Served in WWI, finishing as captain. Sent to Indochina in 1939 as officer of the <i>Coloniale</i> where he stayed during the war. Promoted to general in 1943. Succeeded with his superior, General Sabatier, in evacuating approximately 6,000 men of the <i>Armée d'Indochine</i> to China.
Aussaresses, Paul	Captain/ <i>adjoint</i> / chief-of-staff to de Bollardière	<i>11<sup>e</sup> Bataillon parachutiste de choc, 1<sup>er</sup> RCP, 29<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de marche de tirailleurs sénégalais, état-major op. (base aéroporté nord), demi- brigade parach. du sud de l'Indochine</i>	October 1948-July 1951	Hanoi (parade and hospital), Haiphong, Hai Duong, Viet Tri, Hoa Binh, Fuk Yen, Mong Cai, Tien Yen and <i>route coloniale</i> 4/Cao Bang	Born 1918 in Saint-Paul-Cap-de- Joux (Tarn). Served as officer cadet at the military academy of Cherchell (Algeria) in 1941. Volunteered for secret services during WWII. Helped to set up the <i>service actions</i> . Founded the <i>11<sup>e</sup> Bataillon parachutiste de choc</i> after the war.
Bigéard, Marcel	Captain, <i>commandant</i> and finally lieutenant- colonel	<i>2<sup>e</sup> bataillon du 23<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'infanterie coloniale (RIC), 3<sup>e</sup> Compagnie du bataillon autonome thaï, Groupement de commandos n° 2 de la 2<sup>e</sup> compagnie (GC2), 3<sup>e</sup> Bataillon thaï, Bataillon de marche indochinois (BMI), Demi- brigade coloniale de commandos parachutistes (BCCP) and 6<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de parachutistes coloniaux (BPC)</i>	November 1945- September 1954 (with two periods of leave in France)	Saigon, Cochinchina, Haiphong, Hanoi, highland and delta of Tonkin, Luang Prabang and Central Laos, Lang Son, Nghia Lo and Dien Bien Phu	Born 1916. Originally a bank employee. Participated in the battle of France. Escaped after capture to join the Free French. Finished war with the rank of captain.

<sup>948</sup><sup>949</sup>

The list includes one British liaison officer.

Saint-Cyr has been the officer training institution primarily of the French infantry but to some extent also of the cavalry. Until 1935 and from 1939-40 it also trained officers of the air force. Saint-Maixent specialised in the training of *sous-officiers* between 1948 and 1951. Saumur has trained members of the cavalry/armoured units. The *Ecole polytechnique* has been an academic institution but came under the auspices of the French Ministry of Defence. French undergraduate students have been cadets in the French Army and worn uniforms on certain occasions.

Blaizot, Roger	<i>Général de corps d'armée/</i> commander-in-chief	HQ	(1936) May 1948- September 1949	Based primarily in Saigon but inspecting troops and positions all over Indochina while also meeting various military and civilian personalities	Born 1891. Was a graduate of St. Cyr and member of the (Armée) <i>Coloniale</i> . Spent a short period in Indochina in 1936. Served as general under Vichy before being designated by the <i>Comité française de la libération nationale</i> (CFLN) in Algiers in September 1943 as chief of the military mission in India and commander of the expeditionary force for the Far East (future CEFEQ).
Bondis, Paul	General and commissioner	Franco-Vietnamese forces in southern Vietnam	September 1951-June 1953	Southern Vietnam	Born 1895. Graduated from St. Cyr. Named <i>général de brigade</i> in 1944 and <i>général de division</i> in 1950.
Boyer de Latour du Moulin, Pierre	General	Command of troops in Cochinchina and northern Vietnam	1947-1950	Cochinchina and northern Vietnam	Born 1896. Joined army in 1914 serving throughout WWI. Attended St. Maixent before going to Morocco. Wounded in 1940. Fought in Tunisia, France and Germany from 1943 on. Became a general in 1946.
Brice, Pierre (Pierre-Louis le Bris)	Marine	<i>Commandos de Penfentenyo and Jaubert</i>	1947-51	n/a	Born 1929 in Brest into an aristocratic family. Father was a marine officer. PB joined the resistance during WWII. Entered the navy and was trained as combat diver in Algeria. Volunteered for Indochina at the age of 19.
Britsch, Jacques	Lieutenant-colonel/ <i>commandant-en-second</i>	<i>Groupe mobile (GM) 3 and centre d'études des officiers de l'armée vietnamienne</i>	September 1953-May 1954 (interrupted by a short spell in Japan)	Based in Hanoi. Visits to Bac Ninh (Tonkin). Last days in Pnom Penh and Saigon	n/a
Buis, Georges	<i>Chef de battalion</i>	<i>2<sup>e</sup> Division blindé (DB)/</i> staff member in Leclerc's HQ	August 1945-August 1946	Mainly Saigon	Born 1912 in Saigon. Graduated from St. Cyr and the <i>Ecole de chars de combat</i> . Served with the <i>509<sup>e</sup> Régiment de chars de combat</i> from 1935 on. Held various posts in the Levant before WWII. Joined the Free French in Palestine in 1941. Participated in the Syria campaign. Served under Catroux in Damascus. Joined Leclerc's <i>2<sup>e</sup> DB</i> in 1943. Took part in the liberation of France and the conquest of Germany.
Carpentier, Marcel	General/ commander-in-chief	HQ	September 1949-December 1950	Based in Saigon	Born 1895. Went through St. Cyr. Excelled during WWII, rising rapidly from colonel in 1942 to <i>général de brigade</i> (1943) and to <i>général de division</i> (1944). Acted as General Juin's chief-of-staff during the Italian campaign. Served as chief-of-staff of the <i>1<sup>ère</sup> Armée</i> . Became commander-in-chief of French forces in Morocco after WWII.
Chanson, Charles-Marie	Colonel, <i>commandant supérieur, général de brigade, adjoint/</i> commissioner of the Republic	HQ/ French forces in Central Cochinchina and forces in S. Indochina	February 1947-July 1951 (died from an attack)	Based in Saigon with inspections and meetings all over South Vietnam	Born 1902 in Nice. Attended the <i>Ecole polytechnique</i> and the <i>Ecole d'application de Fontainebleau</i> . Opted for a career in the artillery. Various posts and operations in Morocco during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Promoted to captain he became <i>inspecteur des études</i> at the

	in S. Indochina (later S. Vietnam)				<i>Polytechnique</i> in 1937. Attended the <i>Ecole de guerre</i> during 1939-40. Assigned to the <i>VI<sup>e</sup> Armée</i> he was sent to North Africa in 1942. Promoted to Lieutenant-colonel in 1943. Rallied to the Free French. Attached to the headquarters of the land forces in Britain.
Chauvin, René	<i>Commandant</i>	4 <sup>e</sup> Division navale d'assaut (Dinassaut 4)	December 1952-December 1953	Haiphong, Hanoi, Ninh Giang, Song Hoa, Dong Lam, Song Giem Ho, Hai Duong, Song Thai Binh, Red River and <i>Canal des bambous</i> (all Tonkin Delta)	Born 1910 in La Rochelle. Did his mandatory military service in the navy ending up in the reserve. Decided to sign up for regular service taking the necessary exams. But did not attend the <i>Ecole navale</i> . Served in the Mediterranean and North Africa in the early years of WWII until the allied landings. Refused to leave for Vichy France. Instead, signed up for the battleship <i>Richelieu</i> in New York. Finished the war with the Eastern Fleet in the Indian Ocean. When he volunteered for Indochina he was 42 years old.
Cogny, René	<i>Général de division/ commander</i>	HQ/ French forces in N. Indochina (later North Vietnam)	June 1953-October 1954	Based in Hanoi (but with inspections and meetings all over northern Indochina)	Born 1902. Employed at the stock market. Attended and graduated from the <i>Ecole polytechnique</i> . Embarked on a career in the artillery. Escaped imprisonment after the armistice. Entered the resistance. Arrested and deported to a concentration camp but liberated in 1945. Became a protégé of de Lattre.
Corniquet, Claude	Corporal	<i>1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon de marche du 2<sup>e</sup> régiment des tirailleurs marocains (RTM)</i>	1947-9	Cam Lo, Dong Ha/Cua Viet, Quang Tri, and Dong Hoi (all Annam)	Born 1928 in Rouen. Father left when CC was 5. Latter was raised by his mother, a weaver, and grandparents. CC suffered early bout of polio. Forced to leave school at the age of 12/13 for economic reasons and lack of better grades. Began apprenticeship as a fitter in Petit-Quevilly. But due to the wide-spread allied bombing his mother decided to send him to a Vichyiste <i>Centre de jeunesse</i> where he received logis, food and training. Joined the army in June 1945 at the age of 17 (and 4 months) to escape uncle's business. First stage of training occurred with a regiment of <i>chasseurs</i> in Auch. Postings in Limoges and Germany (with a unit of <i>Zuaves</i> ) followed. Was found unsuitable to become a <i>chasseur alpin</i> during a short spell in the Hautes-Pyrénées between these postings. Moved to Morocco in 1947 where he was allocated to a <i>tirailleurs</i> regiment.
Crépin, Jean	Colonel/ <i>adjoint to General Valluy/ commissioner for the Tonkin and North Annam</i>	Originally 9 <sup>e</sup> DIC	Probably 1946-1948	Saigon/Hanoi and North Annam	Born 1908 in Bernaville (Somme). Graduated from the <i>Ecole polytechnique</i> . Entered the <i>Artillerie coloniale</i> . Had tours in China and Cameroon where he rallied to the Free French in 1940. Participated in the Libyan campaign. Made a

					<i>Compagnon de la libération</i> by de Gaulle.
De Galard Terraube, Geneviève	<i>Convoyeuse de l'air</i> ('flying nurse')	<i>Armée de l'air/force aérienne de projection</i> (FAP) (formerly <i>Groupe des moyens militaires de transports aériens</i> (GMMTA))	April 1953-May 1954 (interrupted by a short spell in North Africa)	Hanoi, Lai Chau, Na San, Dien Bien Phu (all Tonkin) and Luang Prabang (Laos)	Born 1925. Father was an officer. Attended all-female and Catholic boarding school. Studied languages at university. Then trained as auxiliary nurse before signing up with the air force.
De Hauteclocque (Leclerc), Philippe	General/ <i>commandant supérieur</i> / interim high-commissioner	HQ/ French forces in Indochina	October 1945-July 1946	Cochinchina, Cambodia and North Vietnam	Born 1902 into an old aristocratic family. Graduated first from St. Cyr, then from the <i>Ecole de guerre</i> in 1939. The young captain escaped captivity and joined de Gaulle in 1940. Took pseudonym of Leclerc. Succeeded in rallying Cameroun and Equatorial Africa to the Free French. Commanded French troops in the Sahara against the Italians. Participated in the re-conquest of Tunisia in 1943. Made general, he set up the <i>2<sup>e</sup> Division blindée</i> (DB). Participated in the D-Day landings and the liberation of Paris. Led division through France and towards Germany. Chosen to lead expeditionary corps against Japan before the latter's capitulation. Represented France during the capitulation ceremonies in Tokyo in September 1945.
De la Croix de Castries, Christian	(Lieutenant-) colonel, made <i>général de brigade</i> in the middle of the battle of Dien Bien Phu	<i>Groupe mobile 2</i> and garrison of Dien Bien Phu (among others)	1946-June 1954 (with temporary returns to France)	Dien Bien Phu (among other locations)	Born 1902 as son of a duke. Came from an old family of the Languedoc. (One ancestor served Louis XVI as marshal and minister.) Graduated from the military school of Saumur and became a member of the cavalry. Was injured and captured in 1940. Escaped and participated in the campaigns in Italy, France and southern Germany. Became a protégé of de Lattre. Attended the <i>Ecole de guerre</i> in 1949.
De Lacoste Lareymondie, Alain	Head of civil cabinet under de Lattre	HQ	1951	Saigon	Born 1921 in Niort (Deux-Sèvres). Received a law degree from the University of Poitiers. Worked as an auditor in the <i>Conseil d'état</i> in 1946 and as a lecturer at the <i>Institut d'études politiques</i> in 1949.
De Lattre de Tassigny, Bernard	Lieutenant	Vietnamese unit	Unknown-1951	Tonkin	Only son of General de Lattre
De Lattre de Tassigny, Jean	General/ commander-in-chief & high commissioner	(Headquarters)	15. Dec. 1950-19. Dec. 1951	Based primarily in Saigon	Born 1889 in Moulleron-en-Pareds (Vendée). Early schooling at St. Joseph de Poitiers before entering St. Cyr. Specialised in cavalry. Finished WWI as a captain. Served in Morocco in the 1920s. Became staff member of General Weygand in 1932, then in Metz under Giraud. After completing a training at the <i>Centre des hautes études militaires</i> eventually appointed chief of staff of the <i>V<sup>e</sup> Armée</i> .

					Promoted to general in 1939. Named commander of the <i>14<sup>e</sup> Division d'infanterie</i> at the outbreak of WWII. Appointed commander of troops in Tunisia after the armistice. Later in charge of the Montpellier region where he attempted to resist full German occupation in 1943. Imprisoned but fled and joined allies in September 1943. Commanded <i>1<sup>ère</sup> Armée</i> landing in southern France. Led it from the Provence all the way into Bavaria. At the end of the war in charge of French-occupied sector in Germany. Followed by appointment as <i>inspecteur-général</i> of the army and chief-of-general-staff. Then named vice-president of the <i>Conseil supérieur de la guerre</i> after being relieved of c-g-s job in 1947. Struggled to collaborate with Montgomery in the European Defensive Alliance after the Bruxelles Treaty in 1948.
De Saint Marc, Hélié	Lieutenant, captain/post commander	Post of Ta Lung, <i>3<sup>e</sup> Régiment étranger d'infanterie</i> (REI), <i>1<sup>er</sup> and 2<sup>e</sup> Bataillon étranger de parachutistes</i> (BEP), <i>2<sup>e</sup> Compagnie indochinoise de parachutistes de la légion étrangère</i> (CIPLE)	1948-50 1951-3 1954	RC4, Ta Lung, Cao Bang (Chinese border), Hao Binh, Hanoi, Haiphong and Hue	Born 1922 in Bordeaux. Father was a lawyer and anti-republican by choice. HSM's youth was strongly influenced by religion. Joined the resistance at the age of 19 as a courier. Was arrested on the Spanish border in 1943 and deported to Buchenwald and Langenstein. Was liberated in 1945. Went through St. Cyr between 1946 and 1947. Chose the Foreign Legion upon graduation.
Delon, Alain	<i>Fusilier marin</i>	Navy	Spring 1954-spring 1956	Saigon (arsenal and harbour)/Cochinchina	Born 1935 in Seaux. Father was the director of a cinema. Spent youth in a Catholic institution but was expelled on several occasions. Trained as a butcher before joining the navy at the age of 17.
Delpey, Roger	Sergeant (and war correspondent)	<i>2<sup>e</sup> Compagnie de la Bataillon de marche du 151<sup>e</sup> régiment d'Infanterie</i> (RI)	February 1947-September 1949 (February 1952-approx. June 1952)	Saigon, <i>Plaine des Joncs</i> , Mekong, My Luong, Tra Vinh, Vinh Long and Tieu Can (all Cochinchina), Binh Phu and Tan My (Tonkin) (Hanoi, Haiphong, Hoa Binh, Cao Bang, Thai Binh, Vinh Yen, Red River, Phu Ly-Nam Dinh-Huang Yen triangle, Ninh Binh (all Tonkin) and Hue-Dong Hoi (Annam) (as correspondent)	n/a

Denis, Henry	Captain	<i>10<sup>e</sup> Compagnie du 21<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'infanterie coloniale (RIC)/ headquarters of the troupes coloniales/ bureau de guerre psychologique of the headquarters of the land forces in North Vietnam/ Mixed Commission for Vietnam</i>	June 1948-December 1950 May 1951-July 1953 April 1954-April 1955	Lang Son (Tonkin) and South Vietnam	Born 1920 in Vitry-le-François (Marne). Father was a general. Graduated from the <i>Ecole spéciale militaire</i> . Was demobilised in 1943. Joined the <i>Organisation de résistance de l'armée</i> (ORA). Arrested by the Gestapo and deported to Mathausen. Liberated at the end of the war and put on leave until Indochina tour.
Dibon, Robert	Private, possibly corporal	<i>21<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'infanterie coloniale (RIC)</i>	December 1945-July 1947	Among others: Saigon/Gia Dinh, Tan Biep <sup>950</sup> , Tan Phung (all Cochinchina/southern Vietnam), Bay of Ha Long, Haiphong, Hanoi, Hai Duong, Gia Lam, Lang Son, Bac Ninh, Luc Nam and Hon Gay (all Tonkin)	Served with <i>3<sup>e</sup> Bataillon 43<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'infanterie coloniale (RIC)</i> in Tunisia between 1942 and 1943. Joined the allies with the battalion after the landings in North Africa. Changed to the <i>4<sup>e</sup> Régiment de tirailleurs sénégalais (9<sup>e</sup> DIC)</i> in April 1943 up to September 1944 while participating in the Doubs campaign. Was part of the <i>21<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'infanterie coloniale</i> from October 1944. Entered Germany with French troops. Was 21 years old when posted to Indochina.
Dupont d'Isigny, Paule	Nurse, pilot and paratrooper	<i>Infirmières pilotes secouristes de l'air (IPSA)</i>	n/a	n/a	Former member of the resistance and death camp survivor
Dupont-Subirada, Ginette	<i>Sous-lieutenant/ translator/ editor</i>	<i>Direction générale des études et recherches (DGER)</i>	October 1945-October 1946 (repatriated on health grounds)	Saigon and Laos (HQ at Savannakhet, Vientiane and Luang Prabang)	Was a 20-year-old secretary in the accountancy office of the <i>Banque de France</i> when WWII broke out. Although helping to transport documents and cheques for the resistance she never belonged to a resistance network. Held back by worries for her younger sisters and her widowed mother. Feeling of guilt prompted her to sign up with the DGER in May 1945. First assignments in Paris involved allocation of military pay to soldiers' families and censorship work.
Ely, Paul	General/ commander-in-chief and commissioner-general	HQ	June 1954-June 1955	First Hanoi/Tonkin then mainly Saigon	Born 1897 in Saloniki (Greece). Was the son of an administrator charged with overseeing western interests in the crumbling Ottoman Empire. Studied in Crete and later at a Lycée in Brest. Training at St. Cyr was interrupted by WWI where he was wounded. After resuming training posted to the <i>Armée d'Orient</i> in the early 1920s. Attended <i>Ecole supérieure de guerre</i> in 1928. Appointed <i>chef de bataillon</i> in the <i>4<sup>e</sup> Bureau</i> of the <i>grand quartier général</i> in 1939. Seriously wounded in his arm in

950

Probably misspelled. There is, however, a Tan Hiep.



					<p>June 1940. Took over <i>10<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de chasseurs à pieds</i> in 1941. Became important figure in the ORA (<i>Organisation de résistance de l'armée</i>) from November 1942 on. Wife was arrested by the Gestapo and deported to Ravensbrück in 1943. Ely fled to London in 1944 and from there to Algiers. Promoted to colonel he represented the allied high command to the resistance. Upon liberation he became <i>Directeur adjoint</i> of the <i>Forces françaises de l'Intérieur</i> (FFI). As <i>général de brigade</i> he integrated the latter into the allied armies in March 1945. From May 1946 on and as <i>général de division</i> he directed the military cabinet of the <i>Ministère des armées</i>. In 1947 he commanded the 7<sup>th</sup> military region (Dijon). Became chief-of-staff under de Lattre in January 1948, followed by a job as <i>inspecteur de l'armée de terre</i>. In August 1949 he became <i>général de corps d'armée</i> representing France at the Western European Union in London and from 1952 on at the Permanent Group in Washington. In August 1953 he became chief of general staff of the armed forces. Vainly tried to persuade the US to intervene during the battle of Dien Bien Phu.</p>
Esquilat, Henri	Commandant, lieutenant-colonel/ liaison officer	French mission to Cao Dai troops	Around 1947-9	Tourane and Tay Ninh (Cochinchina)	n/a
Fricaud-Chagnaud, Charles-Georges	Captain, commandant and advisor to Emperor Bao Dai	<i>4<sup>e</sup> Division vietnamienne de montagne</i> and <i>4<sup>e</sup> Groupement de compagnies de la garde montagnarde</i>	1950-1951 (but possibly before and after)	Probably Dalat and Saigon (headquarters) and possibly Ban Me Thuot, Play Cu and Dong Nai (all southern Vietnam)	Born 1923 in Angoulême. Educated at St. Paul. Graduated from St. Cyr. Entered resistance in the Jura in 1943. Founded network in the Vienne.
Geoffrey, Hugo	Captain	<i>4<sup>e</sup> and 5<sup>e</sup> Compagnie de la 13<sup>e</sup> DBLE</i> , French delegation to the int. control commission for Vietnam	March 1946-June 1948 July 1954-June 1956	Cochinchina, central Annam and Tonkin	Born 1919 in Vienna. Family was forced to flee Austria in the 1930s because of its leftist orientation. HG joined the Foreign Legion in 1938 and was allocated to the <i>1<sup>er</sup> Régiment étranger d'infanterie</i> (REI). Had tours in Syria and Lebanon. Participated in the battle of Bir Hakeim and El Alamein. Stayed in Tunisia until 1944. Served in campaigns of Italy as well as in eastern and southern France. Acquired French citizenship in his later career.
Gérin-Roze, François	Lieutenant	<i>5<sup>e</sup> Cuirassiers</i>	July 1952-October 1954	Thu Dau Mot, plateaux montagnards and Saigon (all South Vietnam)	Born 1928 in Rouen. Father was a lawyer. FGR graduated from St. Cyr. Joined <i>152<sup>e</sup> Bataillon d'Infanterie</i> in Mutzig after WWII. Went through training for <i>sous-officiers</i> in Strasbourg in 1948. Joined <i>99<sup>e</sup> Bataillon d'infanterie alpine</i> the same

					year. Switched to cavalry/armoured units attending the <i>Ecole d'application de l'armée blindée et cavalerie de Saumur</i> in 1949. Tours in Meknès and Algiers followed.
Girod de Langlade, Paul	<i>Général de division/ commandant supérieur</i>	Land forces in Cambodia	1952-4	Cambodia	Born 1894. Joined the 3 <sup>e</sup> <i>Régiment de chasseurs à cheval</i> in 1913. Switched to the infantry, becoming <i>sous-lieutenant</i> shortly after. Severely wounded. Switched again, this time to the air force. Finished the war as captain, commander of a bomber squadron and a <i>Chevalier de la légion d'honneur</i> . Re-joined the cavalry in 1923. Departed for Morocco four years later to participate in the pacification campaigns. Promoted to <i>chef d'escadrons</i> in 1936. Stationed in Tunisia during the fall of France. Assumed command of a <i>Groupe autonome de chasseurs d'Afrique</i> in 1941. Promoted lieutenant-colonel one year later. Joined Free French and participated in the battles of Tunisia. Accepted Leclerc's offer to join his 2 <sup>e</sup> <i>DB</i> assuming command of a tactical group and fighting all the way to Germany. By then a general, he became governor of Strasbourg after the war. Took command of the newly re-opened cavalry school at Saumur. Returned to Morocco taking over the <i>Division de Casablanca</i> while being promoted <i>général de division</i> .
Hill, Henry	Major/liaison officer	Staff officer with 26 <sup>th</sup> Gurkha Brigade (attached to French Army/Foreign Legion)	1953-4	Hanoi, Da Nang and Saigon, plus field trips	Attended <i>Ecole de guerre</i> in his early career. Served with SOE in Sumatra and Dutch East Indies in 1945.
Hinterlang, Guy	Lieutenant and later captain	<i>Forces supplétifs des forces fr. du sud Vietnam, 21<sup>e</sup> groupe aérien d'observation d'artillerie (GAOA), 2<sup>e</sup> groupe d'artillerie du Centre-Annam (II/69e RAA)/I/15<sup>e</sup> RA</i>	November 1950-June 1953	Loc Nin/ <i>Terres rouges</i> (Cochinchina), Dong Hoi, Tourane and Hue (Annam), Haiphong and An Khe (Tonkin)	Born 1925 in Menton. Father was and officer. GH entered the <i>Ecole de la garde</i> in 1944. Rallied to the FFI. Arrested and deported to Buchenwald. Joined the 2 <sup>e</sup> <i>Légion de garde républicaine mobile</i> after the liberation. Went through the <i>Ecole spéciale militaire interarmée</i> between 1946 and 1947. Chose artillery. Trained for air observation in Germany.
Huteau, Pierre	<i>Sergent-chef/adjoint</i>	<i>Régiment d'infanterie coloniale de Maroc (RICM)</i>	October 1945-April 1947	Saigon/Ta Dinh, (Ga) Tour Cham (South Vietnam), Ban Koi (North Vietnam), Dalat and Lang Bian (hunting) (both Annam)	Born 1923. Father was an entrepreneur in public works before dying from the effects of his war wounds in 1932. PH was largely raised by his grandparents. Attended school in Tours finishing his <i>baccalauréat</i> . Studied law at the Sorbonne for 2 years. But abandoned his studies to avoid the <i>Service de travail obligatoire</i> . Fled via Spain where he was briefly imprisoned. Joined army in North

					Africa in 1943, choosing the <i>Régiment d'infanterie coloniale de Maroc</i> where his grandfather had already served. Landed with reinforcements in the Provence in October 1944. Saw action in south-western France, the Rhone Valley, the Vosges and southern Germany. Disappointed by what he regarded as a selfish and business-like attitude of civilian France he did not resist being put forward as a 'volunteer' for Indochina by his colonel.
Lacheroy, Charles	(Lieutenant-) colonel	<i>22<sup>e</sup> Coloniale (not further specified) plus supplétifs /Bureau de la guerre psychologique</i>	February 1951- approx. August 1953	Bien Hoa and Thu Duc (Cochinchina)	Born 1906 in Chalon-sur-Saône. Attended the <i>Prytanée militaire de la Flèche</i> and the <i>Ecole spéciale militaire</i> . Served in the <i>22<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'infanterie coloniale</i> (RIC) and later the <i>6<sup>e</sup> Bataillon des tirailleurs sénégalais</i> . Had tours in the Lebanon, Syria and Morocco. Posted to staff headquarters of the <i>2<sup>e</sup> Corps d'armée</i> in Dakar in 1943. Held various roles with the <i>infanterie coloniale</i> until 1945. Had short stint in the Ivory Coast as commander of the <i>Bataillon autonome</i> . Employed at the <i>Section d'études et d'information des troupes coloniales</i> in 1950.
Lacouture, Jean	<i>Attaché de presse/ brigadier-chef</i>	<i>Service de presse/ information/ Leclerc's staff (headquarters)</i>	October 1945-1946 (later returned as journalist on several occasions)	Mainly Saigon, Hanoi and Hue	Born 1921 into a bourgeois family of Bordeaux. Joined the resistance relatively late in WWII. Later transferred to Leclerc's <i>2<sup>e</sup> DB</i> . Volunteered for the Far East in July 1945.
Lagier, Raymond	Captain	<i>Direction générale des études et recherches (DGER)/ French Mission to Indochina</i>	Autumn 1945	Dien Bien Phu	Born 1914 in Pontarlier (Doubs). Graduated from the <i>Ecole supérieure de commerce de Paris</i> . Served as <i>sous-officier</i> with the <i>20<sup>e</sup> Bataillon des chasseurs alpins</i> . Became director of Floquet in London before mobilisation on the eve of WWII.
Langlais, Pierre	Lieutenant-colonel	Headquarters Dien Bien Phu (among others)	Several tours from 1945 on until September 1954	Dien Bien Phu (among others)	Born 1909. Graduated from St.-Cyr.
Le Chatelier, Jean-Jacques	<i>Chef de bataillon</i>	<i>27<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de tirailleurs algériens and Etat-major interarmé, section aide américaine, 4<sup>e</sup> bureau</i>	October 1953-June 1955	Hanoi, Phu Lo, Phuc Yen, Nam Dinh, Nim Binh, Haiphong, Vinh Yen/Huong Canh, Dong Do, Phu Lo, Sept Pagodes, Hai Duong, Do Son, Thai Binh, Ninh Binh, Phu Ly, Kien An, Dong Ha, Ha Dong and Cat Bi (all Tonkin), Tourane/Da Nang, Dien An and Khe Sanh	n/a

				(Annam), Thakhek, Vientiane and Seno (Laos) as well as Saigon, Pnom Penh and Angkor Vat (last two Cambodia)	
Léger, Paul	(Sous-) lieutenant, captain/ commandant de base	1 <sup>er</sup> Bataillon/demi-brigade SAS, Groupement des commandos mixtes aéroportés (GCMA) and Compagnie d'instruction	February 1946-October 1947 April 1953-December 1954	Saigon, Capes St. Jacques and Dau Tieng (Cochinchina), Vientiane and Luang Prabang (Laos), Nam Dinh (Tonkin) and Island of Cu Lao Re (off Annam)	Born 1922 in Azemmour (Morocco). Volunteered for the 1 <sup>er</sup> Régiment de zouaves in 1942. Travelled to Britain to train as paratrooper in 1943. Parachuted behind enemy lines in France (1944) and Holland (1945).
Legoubé, Raymond	Sous-lieutenant (de réserve)/ chef commando	3 <sup>e</sup> Bataillon thaï (BT3)	November 1952-September 1954 (serving with BT3) (possibly earlier postings in Indochina)	Dien Bien Phu and prison camp (Tuan Giao) (Could also have participated in earlier operations in Na San, Thuan Chau, Muong Sai, Black River, Muong Lam, Song Ma, Muong region, Vinh Yen (all Tonkin) and border to Annam where BT3 was engaged)	n/a
Le Pen, Jean-Marie	Sous-lieutenant	Parachute unit	1954-5	n/a	Born 1928 in Trinité-sur-Mer. Attended <i>Science Po</i> and studied law in Paris. Became controversial leader of the student union UNEF.
Leroy, Jean	Colonel	Unités mobiles pour la défense des chrétientés (UMDC)	Throughout the war	Ben Tre	Born 1920 as son of a French soldier and a Vietnamese peasant woman. Entered ( <i>Armée</i> ) coloniale in 1940 eventually becoming an officer.
Lescastreyres, Raymond	Lieutenant	1 <sup>er</sup> Régiment étranger de cavalerie (REC)	August 1952-approx. November 1954	Saigon, Mekong Delta, <i>Plaine des Joncs</i> (all Cochinchina), Nam Dinh, Dong Ha/Tonkin, Tourane and <i>Rue sans Joie</i> (Annam)	Served as a clandestine courier between Mont and Marzan during the German occupation. But forced to flee to Vichy France after being denounced. Entered French Army eventually ending up in North Africa. After two years of training embarked in France in September 1944. Participated in the liberation of the Alsace pushing all the way to Lake Constance. Elevated to the rank of <i>maréchal de logis</i> after the armistice. Stationed in Wurzach, Neustadt and Spire. Underwent further training in Coëtquidan and Saumur attaining the rank of lieutenant.
Levavasseur (no first name indicated)	NCO, then lieutenant	1 <sup>ère</sup> Division coloniale d'Extrême-Orient	1946-8	NW Tonkin (Thai area),	Born and grew up in Indochina as son of a colonel in the <i>Coloniale</i> . Learned Vietnamese before he could speak French.

Liddell Hart, Adrian (alias Peter Brand)	<i>Légionnaire</i>	<i>1<sup>er</sup> Régiment étranger de cavalerie (REC)/ 1<sup>e</sup> Groupe d'escadrons (du) groupement amphibie</i>	1950-1	Saigon/Cholon, My Tho, Sadek camp and <i>Plaine des Joncs</i> (all Cochinchina)	Born 1922 as son of Sir Basil Liddell Hart. Educated at St. Andrews School in Berkshire, Eton College and King's College, Cambridge. Commissioned into the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in 1941. Saw service in the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, in London and with Combined Operations Command, British North African Forces. Finished war as flag lieutenant to the admiral commanding Iceland in 1945. Became the Liberal Party's candidate for Blackpool in the General Election in 1945. Worked at the UN until 1947. Served in administrative roles with the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) from 1947 to 1948. Had stints with Westminster Press Provincial Newspapers Ltd., The Yorkshire Observer and as Lobby Correspondent at the House of Commons between 1949 and 1950. Stood again as Liberal Party candidate, this time for Sowerby (Yorkshire) during the general election in 1950.
Massu, Jacques	Lieutenant-colonel/inspector	<i>Groupement de marche de la 2<sup>e</sup> Division blindé (DB)</i>	October 1945-November 1946 and June 1948	My Tho, Tai Ninh, <i>Plaine des Joncs</i> and Na Thrang (all Cochinchina), plus Hanoi	Born 1908 in Châlons-sur-Marne. Father was an artillery officer. Educated in Paris, the <i>Collège libre de Gien</i> and at the <i>Prytanée militaire</i> between 1919 and 1928 before entering St. Cyr. Graduated from the latter in 1930 as <i>sous-lieutenant</i> choosing the <i>infanterie coloniale</i> . First served in a regiment of <i>tirailleurs sénégalais</i> before participating in operations in Morocco and the High Atlas in the early 1930s. Military and civilian postings in France, Togo and Chad followed. In the latter territory he rallied to de Gaulle after the armistice in 1940. Under Leclerc he participated in the raids on Mourzouk and Fezzan where he became <i>adjoint</i> to the governor. Later served under Leclerc again in the Tunisian campaign before moving to Britain to prepare for D-Day. Landed and fought all the way through the Vosges, Strasbourg, Colmar and Germany. Reached the rank of lieutenant-colonel at the end of the war.
Méry, Guy	Captain/ <i>chef 3<sup>e</sup> bureau EM/ sous-chef opérations</i>	<i>4<sup>e</sup> RM and 4<sup>e</sup> DVN<sup>951</sup>/3<sup>e</sup> bureau/ Forces terrestres des plateaux montagnards (FTPM)/French deleg. to the</i>	April 1953-approx. May 1955	Play Cu (southern Vietnam)/central highlands and Hanoi	Born 1920 in Buzançais (Indres). Father was a farmer. Graduated from St. Cyr and completed cavalry training in 1939. Was demobbed in 1943. Joined FFI. Arrested in 1944 and deported to Struthof, then Dachau. Re-joined officer corps of cavalry/armoured troops after the war. Underwent further military

		Intern. Control Commission			training, Entered the combined headquarters of the armed forces in 1950.
Morlière, Louis	General/ commander/ commissioner of the Republic	HQ Hanoi/ forces in the Tonkin	1946- probably 1947 (relieved of his command by Leclerc)	Tonkin	Born in 1897. Attended Saint-Maixent. Several tours in Indochina during the interwar years. Participated in the Tunisian, Italian and French campaigns during WWII. Appointed <i>général de brigade</i> in 1946, then <i>général de division</i> .
Navarre, Henri	General/ commander- in-chief	HQ	May 1953- June 1954	Based in Saigon	Born 1898 in Villefranche de Rouergue. Entered St.-Cyr in 1916. Served in WWI from 1917 on as <i>aspirant</i> and <i>sous-lieutenant</i> . Participated in the Syria campaign in 1919 with the <i>spahis</i> . Posted to Germany during the 1920s before entering the <i>Ecole supérieure de guerre</i> . Participated in the pacification of the Atlas and Morocco from 1930 to 1934. Took on several posts within the intelligence services until being recalled by Darlan in 1942 for his alleged anti-German activities. Entered ORA. In November 1944 he took over command of a tank unit of the <i>1<sup>ère</sup> Armée</i> , participating in the war until armistice. Chosen director of General Koenig's cabinet in Germany where he stayed except for a brief command in Algeria (1948-9). His last post was that of chief- of-staff to Maréchal Juin at NATO. In 1952 he became <i>général de corps d'armée</i> .
Nyo, Georges	General	3 <sup>e</sup> DIC	February 1946- February 1948	Southern Vietnam	Born 1895. Graduated from St. Cyr and entered the <i>Coloniale</i> . Participated in the pacification of Annam during the 1930s. Went to Northern Africa in 1943 after being part of the armistice army. Finished the war in the rank of a <i>général de brigade</i> .
Paris de Bollardière, Jacques	<i>Commandant</i> , then colonel	<i>Demi-brigade de parachutistes SAS</i>	February 1946-1948 September 1950-June 1953	Cochinchina, Annam, Tonkin, Laos and Cambodia	Born 1907. Father had served under Gallieni in the Tonkin. (Uncle and grandfather had already seen action in Indochina, too.) JPdB graduated from St. Cyr in 1930. Became a lieutenant in the Foreign Legion in 1939 and served in Morocco. Involved in the Norway campaign before rallying to the Free French in 1940. Participated in the campaigns of Dakar, Eritrea, Syria, Libya, Tunisia, France and Germany.
Perrin, André	<i>Chef d'escadron</i>	<i>Service actions/ 2<sup>e</sup> Bureau</i>	1949	Saigon	Born 1913 in Courbevoie. Father was killed in WWI. Mother remarried. AP attended artillery school in Orléans. Served with <i>163<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'artillerie</i> in Metz in 1936. Posted to the Maginot Line at the outbreak of WWII. Captured and sent to the Oflags of Colditz and Lübeck. Escaped in 1943. Attached to intelligence services in 1944. Collaborated with the Office of

					Strategic Services (OSS). Served with artillery regiments after the war. Posted to staff headquarters, <i>Forces armées, 2<sup>e</sup> division</i> in 1950. Liaisoned with CIA during the Korean War.
Piroth, Charles	Colonel	In charge of artillery in Dien Bien Phu	Unknown-1954	Tonkin/Dien Bien Phu	Born in 1906. Entered the army in 1924.
Ponchardier, Pierre	<i>Commandant</i>	<i>Commando Ponchardier</i> and further units after dissolution of above commando	October 1945-1952	Tay Ninh, An Son, Thu Dau Mot, Bien Hoa, Nha Be, My Tho, Can Tho, Tan Chau, Ca Mau and area between Vinh Long and Tra Cu (all Cochinchina during first tour, 1945-6)	Born 1909. Entered the navy in 1927. Was actively involved in the resistance. At the beginning of 1945 he took over the command of the parachute commandos, which were sent to Ceylon in July 1945.
Puga, Hubert	Captain, then <i>chef d'escadron</i>	Army headquarters Paris/ <i>1<sup>er</sup> Bureau</i>	n/a	n/a	Born 1915 in Honfleur (Calvados). Graduated from the <i>Ecole spéciale militaire</i> . Posted to the <i>508<sup>e</sup> Regiment des chars de combat</i> in 1938. Served with various other regiments until demobilised in 1943. Joined allies in North Africa and participated in the campaigns of Italy, France and Germany. Held various staff positions at headquarters of the cavalry and troops in Tunisia. Attended <i>Ecole de guerre</i> in 1952. Attended <i>Centre d'instruction pour les opérations amphibies</i> (CIOA) in 1953. Posted to the headquarters in Paris in 1954.
Raphaël-Leygues, Jacques	<i>Commissaire général de la marine</i> (later <i>conseiller de l'Union Français</i> )	Navy	1945-1950 (interrupted by voyages to China and India) (and several negotiating missions to Indochina between 1952 and 1954)	Saigon, Cam Ranh, Nha Trang, <i>Cap St. Jacques</i> and Paulo Condor (southern Vietnam), Haiphong, Hanoi and Bay of Ha Long (Tonkin), Angkor Vat and Pnom Penh (Cambodia)	Born 1913. Grandson of Georges Leygues, former president and Minister of the Navy during the Third Republic.
Roy, Jules	Lieutenant-colonel	Propaganda services	April 1952-1953 (quit)	Saigon, Na San, Tourane and Angkor Vat	Born 1907 in Rovigo (Algeria). Adopted by a gendarme. Real father was a teacher. JR studied in a seminary in Algiers before call-up. Served with the <i>tirailleurs algériens</i> . Attended Saint-Maixent graduating as <i>sous-lieutenant</i> . Entered the air force eventually commanding a squadron during WWII. Joined RAF after the allied landings in North Africa.

Salan, Raoul	General/ military delegate to the Chinese forces/ military expert at the Dalat Conference/ interim commander- in-chief/ regional commander	HQ/ French forces in North Indochina and China	October 1945-May 1946 May 1947- July 1948 December 1950- May 1953 May- October 1954	Based in Hanoi and Saigon with operations, inspections and meetings in various locations, specifically: Nam Dinh, Ha Dong, Hon Gay, Lang Son, Vinh Yen, Hoa Binh, Nghia Lo, Tu Vu and Na San (all Tonkin), Dalat, Qui Nhon and An Khe (all Annam) and Luang Prabang (Laos)	Born 1899 in Roquecourbe (Tarn). Father worked as a minor local government official. RS graduated from St. Cyr. Served in WWI from 1917 on. Participated in the Levant campaign between 1920 and 1921, where he was gravely wounded. Three long tours in northern Indochina between 1924 and 1937 followed. Back in France, appointed chief of intelligence services to the Ministry of Colonies. In command of a battalion of <i>tirailleurs sénégalais</i> in June 1940 in France. Posts at the 2 <sup>e</sup> <i>bureaux</i> for the colonies, <i>Afrique Occidentale Française</i> (AOF) and in Algiers followed until 1943. Directed as colonel again a regiment of <i>tirailleurs sénégalais</i> during landings on Elba and in the Provence in 1944 and during the campaign in the Alsace. Promoted to general he commanded the 14 <sup>e</sup> <i>Division d'infanterie</i> (DI) (composed of the former resistance) all the way to Konstanz.
Savani, Antoine	Captain, <i>commandant</i> then colonel	Post of Long Xuen, eventually 2 <sup>e</sup> <i>Bureau du</i> <i>Sud Vietnam</i>	Most likely throughout the war	Long Xuyen and Saigon/Cochin China	Was originally from Corsica. Served in a <i>Régiment de tirailleurs annamites</i> . First commander of the <i>Ecole d'enfants de troupe eurasiens de Dalat</i> between 1939 and 1943. Married a Vietnamese woman and learned her language.
Sainteney, Jean (alias Roger, Jean)	<i>Commandant</i> , head of the French military mission to Kungming, commissioner for the Tonkin Republic and North Annam and <i>délégué</i> <i>général</i> (1954)	(see left)	1945-48 and 1954	Mostly Hanoi/Tonkin	Born 1907. Worked for the <i>Banque de l'Indochine</i> between 1929 and 1931. Started his own business in France and married ex-governor Albert Sarraut's daughter. Actively participated in the resistance during WWII. Sent to Indochina after the Japanese capitulation.
Schoendoerffer, Pierre	Cameraman	<i>Service</i> <i>cinématogra-</i> <i>phique des</i> <i>armées</i>	1952- approx. June 1954	Na San and Dien Bien Phu (among other locations)	Born 1928 in Chamalières (Puy-de-Dôme). Worked on a boat of the Swedish merchant fleet at the age of 19 before signing up with the army.
Simon, Guy	Lieutenant/ post commander, <i>commandant- en-second</i> (training)	11 <sup>e</sup> <i>compagnie</i> <i>du 3<sup>e</sup> Bataillon</i> 22 <sup>e</sup> RIC, 2 <sup>e</sup> <i>Bataillon du</i> 19 <sup>e</sup> <i>Régiment</i> <i>mixte</i> <i>d'infanterie</i> <i>coloniale</i> (RMIC)/ <i>Ecole des</i> <i>cadres du Sud</i> <i>Vietnam</i>	1950-1956	Saigon, An Loc, Trang Bom, <i>Cap</i> <i>Saint-Jacques</i> , Tan Nhon, Bien Hoa, Binh Thui (training centre), Xa Bang and Xuan Loc and Da Lat (hospital) (all Cochinchina)	Simon's grandfather, a general, chased Chinese pirates in the Tonkin from 1892 to 1894. Simon himself was born in 1926 in Châtillon-sur-Seine (Côte d'Or). His father was a colonel. His schooling/training led him from the Ecole St.-Sigisberg (Nancy), St. Jean de Béthune and St. Geneviève (Versailles) to St. Cyr where he graduated with a <i>brevet d'études militaires supérieures</i> . From 1948 on he served as <i>sous-lieutenant</i> .
Thabaut, André	<i>Médecin</i> <i>lieutenant</i>	1 <sup>er</sup> <i>Bataillon</i> <i>Muong</i> and 1 <sup>ère</sup> <i>Division</i> <i>d'infanterie</i> <i>d'Extrême-</i> <i>Orient</i> (DIEO)	April 1954- December 1955	Lac Dao, Ke Sat, Hanoi, Dong Ly, Gia Lam (all Tonkin), Saigon, Pleiku, Ban Me Thuot	Born 1928 in the Lauragais (Cathare) as son of an officer. Admitted to the second year of the <i>Ecole du service de santé militaire</i> in Lyon in 1947. Initially stationed in Germany after graduation but sent to



				and Baria (all Cochinchina)	Indochina, like the majority of his year.
Thomazo, Jean	Officer (Could possibly have reached his final rank of colonel during the war)	<i>Groupe mobile nord-africaine</i> and <i>5<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'infanterie</i> (among others)	1946-53	Tonkin and highlands as well as Bau <sup>952</sup> Me Thuot (among others)	Born 1904 into a family of landowners and doctors in the Landes. Graduated from St. Cyr. Participated in the Rif Campaign from 1926 to 1927. Escaped from German occupation via Spain in 1942. Participated in the Italian campaign where he was seriously wounded.
Trinquier, Roger	<i>Commandant</i> , then colonel	<i>Commando B4</i> , <i>Commando Ponchardier</i> , <i>2<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de parachutistes coloniaux</i> (BPC)/ <i>Groupement des commandos mixtes aéroportés</i> (GCMA)	1946-9 and 1953-5	Lao Cay, Lang Son, Lai Chau, Dien Bien Phu and Na San (all Tonkin), central Laos, That Ke and Pak Se (southern Laos), Island of Cu Lao Re (off Annam), Lai Thieu, <i>Plaine des Joncs</i> , Cap Saint Jacques and Saigon (all Cochinchina) as well as Cambodia	Born 1908 in La Baume (Hautes Alpes) into a family of farmers. Attended <i>Ecole normale</i> in Aix-en-Provence and Saint-Maixent (1928). Served as <i>sous-lieutenant</i> in the border area of the Tonkin in 1932. Posted to the Maginot Line in 1937-8. Became a guard at the French embassy in Peking, followed by a stint as <i>adjoint</i> to the commander of the French troops in Shanghai in 1938. Directed the <i>Centre d'instruction des troupes coloniales</i> in Frejus, then the <i>Ecole de saut de Vannes-Meucon</i> in 1950-2 when not in Indochina during the Indochina War.
Vaillant, Albéric	Captain, then <i>chef de bataillon</i>	<i>3<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de la 3<sup>e</sup> demi-brigade de la légion étrangère</i> (DBLE)	November 1951-April 1952	Saigon, <i>Plaine des Joncs</i> and Vinh Loc (all Cochinchina)	Born 1915 in Paris. Came from a military background. Graduated from St. Cyr. Served with <i>146<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'infanterie de forteresse</i> . Interned in an Oflag after armistice. Reached Oran and the Foreign Legion after second escape in 1942. Participated in the Italian and French campaigns.
Valluy, Jean	General/ interim commissioner of the Republic/ commander-in-chief	Originally <i>9<sup>e</sup> Division d'infanterie coloniale</i> (DIC)/ French forces in North Indochina	November 1945-February 1948	Tonkin, later based in Saigon	Born 1899. After graduating from St. Cyr entered the <i>Coloniale</i> at the end of WWI. Stationed in China in 1937. Captured in 1940 in France but released shortly after. Promoted to general in 1944. Served under de Lattre in southern France and Germany.
Vanuxem, Paul	<i>Commandant</i> , later colonel	<i>1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon Nung</i> and <i>Groupe Mobile</i> (GM) 3 among others	Served practically throughout the war	Mostly Tonkin, particularly Vinh Yen and Nam Dinh	Born 1904. Studied philosophy and taught for some time. Eventually entered Saint-Maixent. Finished WWII in the rank of a <i>commandant</i> .

Sources: Lemoine, Simonnet, Laurent, Zeller, Emery et N'Guyen, *Histoire orale, inventaire analytique des sous-séries 3K et 4K, tome I*, 33-62, 100-12, 147-68, 201-12 and 223-6, and *tome II*, 61-6, 155-8, 173-68, 269-78, 303-44 and 359-63, Dalloz, *Dictionnaire de la guerre d'Indochine*, 11-2, 35, 36, 42, 48, 52, 65, 76, 88-9, 130-1, 133-4, 136-8, 140-1, 149-50, 167-8, 179-80, 201-4, 210, 217-9, 220-1, 226, 246-7, 251 and 252, Bodin, *Dictionnaire de la guerre d'Indochine*, 123, J. Balteau, M. Prevost, J.-P. Lobies & R. Damat, *Dictionnaire de Biographie Française, Fascicule CXIV* (2001), pp. 1301-5 and *Tome VIII* (1959), p. 386, B. & M. Wattel (and editorial staff), *Who's Who in France, XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (2001), pp. 759, 1759 and 1776, *Historama/Historia Spécial no. 28*, Duhamel in Forcade, Duhamel & Vial, *Militaires en République*, 363-70, R. Trinquier, *Les maquis d'Indochine (1952-1954)* (1976) and *Le premier bataillon de bérets rouges: Indochine 1947-1949* (1984) (information on author), Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 136-7, individual memoirs, private collections, short biography sent by General Simon (taken from *Who's Who 2001-2002*, p. 1683), short biography sent by Mme Bidoir via e-mail, SHD/DITEEX; [www.anac-fr.com](http://www.anac-fr.com), <http://ccorniquet.100webspaces.net>, [www.duhamel.bz/indochine](http://www.duhamel.bz/indochine), [www.pierrebrice.de](http://www.pierrebrice.de), [www.ordredelaliberation.fr](http://www.ordredelaliberation.fr), [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com), [www.ensoa.terre.defense.gouv.fr](http://www.ensoa.terre.defense.gouv.fr), [www.defense.gouv.fr](http://www.defense.gouv.fr), [www.st-cyr.terre.defense.gouv.fr](http://www.st-cyr.terre.defense.gouv.fr), [www.polytechnique.fr](http://www.polytechnique.fr), [www.ouest-france.fr](http://www.ouest-france.fr), <http://aet.d.club.fr>, [www.kcl.ac.uk/hcma/info/index.shtml](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/hcma/info/index.shtml), [www.iwmcollections.org.uk](http://www.iwmcollections.org.uk), [www.anciens-st-paul-angouleme.org](http://www.anciens-st-paul-angouleme.org), <http://cinema.encyclopedie.personnalites.bifi.fr>, [www.marechal-leclerc.fr.st](http://www.marechal-leclerc.fr.st), [www.aeroclub-ipsa.org](http://www.aeroclub-ipsa.org), [www.evene.fr/celebre/biographie/jean-marie-le-pen-5081.php](http://www.evene.fr/celebre/biographie/jean-marie-le-pen-5081.php), [www.maplandia.com](http://www.maplandia.com) and google maps.

952

This is probably misspelled. The maps show only a Ban or Buon Me Thuot. The latter is in southern Vietnam.

## Appendix C

### British/Commonwealth units engaged in the emergency

Introductory note: The list includes training centres, depots, workshops and detachments, which were, strictly speaking, not units per se but bodies set up in Malaya and staffed by representatives from different units. The list also features mixed regiments made up of various infantry and service units. Further, there are various smaller units attached to larger ones. This goes particularly for the RASC, the REME, the Royal Corps of Signals and the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

#### *Infantry:*

3<sup>rd</sup> Grenadier Guards  
 2<sup>nd</sup> Coldstream Guards  
 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion (Bn) the Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey, 2<sup>nd</sup> of Foot)  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Royal Lincolnshire Regiment  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Devonshire Regiment  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Suffolk Regiment  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Somerset Light Infantry (Prince Albert's)  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the West Yorkshire Regiment (The Prince of Wales' Own)  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the East Yorkshire Regiment (The Duke of York's Own)  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Green Howards (Alexandra, Princess of Wales' Own Yorkshire Regiment)  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Cheshire Regiment  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Worcestershire Regiment  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Royal Hampshire Regiment  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment)  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire)  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn 3<sup>rd</sup> East Anglian Regiment (16<sup>th</sup>/44<sup>th</sup> Foot)  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI)  
 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Wiltshire Regiment (Duke of Edinburgh's)  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Manchester Regiment  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own)  
 The Royal Sussex Regiment  
  
 2<sup>nd</sup> Scots Guards  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Royal Scots Fusiliers  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Seaforth Highlanders (Ross-Shire Buffs, the Duke of Albany's)  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Gordon Highlanders  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Prince Louise's)  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The King's Own Scottish Borderers  
  
 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn the Royal Welsh Fusiliers  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the South Wales Borderers  
  
 17<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Brigade (incl. 1<sup>st</sup> Bn KOYLI and 1<sup>st</sup> Bn Gordon Highlanders)  
 26<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Infantry Brigade  
 63<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Infantry Brigade  
 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Sirmoor Rifles)  
 2<sup>nd</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Sirmoor Rifles)  
 1<sup>st</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Queen Elizabeth's Own Gurkha Rifles  
 2<sup>nd</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Queen Elizabeth's Own Gurkha Rifles  
 1<sup>st</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles  
 2<sup>nd</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles  
 1<sup>st</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles

2<sup>nd</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles

28<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Independent Infantry Brigade (comprised of British, Australian & NZ units)

1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Royal Australian Regiment  
 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn the Royal Australian Regiment  
 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn the Royal Australian Regiment  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn The New Zealand Regiment  
 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn the New Zealand Regiment

1<sup>st</sup> Bn the King's African Rifles (KAR)  
 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn KAR  
 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn KAR  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Northern Rhodesia Regiment  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Rhodesian African Rifles  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Fiji Infantry Regiment  
 The Sarawak Rangers  
 1<sup>st</sup> Bn the Malay Regiment  
 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn the Malay Regiment  
 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn the Malay Regiment  
 4<sup>th</sup> Bn the Malay Regiment  
 5<sup>th</sup> Bn the Malay Regiment  
 6<sup>th</sup> Bn the Malay Regiment  
 7<sup>th</sup> Bn the Malay Regiment  
 The Royal Air Force Regiment (Malaya)  
 1<sup>st</sup> Singapore Infantry Regiment  
 1<sup>st</sup> Singapore Guard Regiment

Staff, Federation Military College (Port Dickson)

Headquarters (HQ) 3 Commando Brigade  
 40 Commando Royal Marines<sup>953</sup>  
 42 Commando Royal Marines  
 45 Commando Royal Marines  
 HMS Centaur, Royal Marines Detachment  
 The Independent Parachute Squadron<sup>954</sup>  
 22<sup>nd</sup> Special Air Service Regiment (SAS) (Malayan Scouts)<sup>955</sup>  
 The Rhodesia Squadron SAS  
 The New Zealand Squadron, SAS

*Armoured corps:*

1<sup>st</sup> King's Dragoon Guards  
 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Dragoons  
 4<sup>th</sup> Queen's Own Hussars  
 11<sup>th</sup> Hussars (Prince Albert's Own)  
 12<sup>th</sup> Royal Lancers (Prince of Wales)  
 13<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> Royal Hussars (Queen Mary's Own)  
 15<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> The King's Royal Hussars

<sup>953</sup> As the name suggests, Royal Marines are part of the Royal Navy. But in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century their roles have largely been that of infantry units employed in difficult terrain and equipped with special arms. In modern times fewer and fewer ships have employed RM detachments.

<sup>954</sup> Paratroopers have represented the airborne infantry element of the army, not the Royal Air Force.

<sup>955</sup> The SAS, too, has been incorporated into the army but has fulfilled special roles, among them long-range missions behind enemy lines and anti-terror operations.

*Artillery:*

2<sup>nd</sup> Field Regiment Royal Artillery (RA)  
 25<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment RA  
 26<sup>th</sup> (formerly 4<sup>th</sup>) Field Regiment RA  
 39<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment RA  
 48<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment RA  
 1<sup>st</sup> Singapore Regiment Royal Artillery (RA)  
 100 Field Battery Royal Australian Artillery (RAA)  
 101 Field Battery RAA  
 103 Field Battery RAA  
 105 Field Battery RAA  
 A Battery Royal Australian Artillery (serving with 28 Commonwealth Infantry Brigade)  
 11<sup>th</sup> Independent Searchlight Troop  
 18<sup>th</sup> Battery 6<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Regiment  
 34<sup>th</sup> Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment  
 93 (Le Cateau) Field Battery  
 95 Independent Field Battery  
 11<sup>th</sup> Independent Mortar Troop RA  
 Headquarters (HQ) RA 17<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Division  
 Malayan Artillery

*Engineers<sup>956</sup>:*

1 (formerly 561) Independent Field Squadron, Royal Engineers (RE)  
 11 Independent Field Squadron, RE  
 50 Gurkha Field Regiment, RE  
 51 Field Engineer Regiment, RE  
 74 Field Park Squadron, RE  
 410 Independent Plant Troop, RE  
 501 Field Squadron (A), RE  
 554 Field Squadron, RE  
 570 Map Reproduction Troop, RE  
 890 E&M Squadron, RE  
 890 Plant Troop (Batu Caves 48) (later HQ Works Squadron)  
 11 Independent Field Squadron, Royal Australian Engineers (with 4 Troop)  
 2 Troop Royal Australian Engineers (attached to 11 Independent Field Squadron, RE)

Light Aid Detachment (LAD), REME Headquarters (17<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Division)  
 1 Infantry Workshops, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME)  
 2 Infantry Workshops, REME  
 10 Infantry Workshop, REME  
 12 Infantry Workshop, REME  
 13 Infantry Workshop, REME  
 14 Infantry Workshop, REME  
 21 Malay Infantry Workshop, REME  
 22 Malay Infantry Workshop, REME  
 26 Gurkha Infantry Brigade LAD  
 75 Aircraft Workshop, REME  
 REME District Workshop, Singapore  
 District Workshop Singapore  
 Base Workshops REME/FASELF  
 10 Transportation Squadron, RE  
 305 Engineer Stores Depot, RE  
 3 Base Ordnance Depot (BOD), Royal Army Ordnance Corps (RAOC), Light Aid  
 Attachment (LAD), REME

<sup>956</sup>

Many of these service units were attached to infantry and armoured units. Some of them were also based in Singapore from where they went out on missions.

General Survey Section  
 2 Air Survey Liaison Section  
 55 Field Survey Squadron  
 74 Field Park Squadron  
 84 Field Survey Squadron

Malay Engineer Squadron (later 75 Field Squadron of 17<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Division)  
 22 Malay Infantry Workshop  
 75 Malayan Field Engineer Squadron, RE  
 78 Malayan Field Park Squadron, RE  
 76 Federal Field Squadron, Federation Engineers

Singapore Engineer Regiment

*Signallers:*

2 Squadrons, Royal Corps of Signals  
 17<sup>th</sup> (Gurkha) Signal Regiment  
 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Signal Squadron (formerly Signal Squadron, 2<sup>nd</sup> Guards Brigade)  
 18<sup>th</sup> Independent Infantry Brigade Signals Squadron  
 28 Commonwealth Infantry Brigade Signal Squadron  
 40 Division Signal Troop  
 65 Gurkha Infantry Brigade Group Signals Troop  
 201 Signal Squadron  
 208 (Commonwealth) Signal Squadron  
 230 Signal Squadron  
 237 Signal Squadron (COMCAN)  
 Malaya Command Signals Squadron  
 18<sup>th</sup> Independent Infantry Brigade Signals Squadron  
 19<sup>th</sup> Air Formation Signal Regiment  
 24<sup>th</sup> Independent Group, Signals WRAC  
 40 Division Signal Troop  
 2 Squadrons Royal Corps of Signals  
 Air Support Signals Troop  
 GHQ Signal Regiment

Malaya Signal Regiment  
 Malaya District Signals Regiment  
 Singapore District Signal Regiment

1 Australian Observer Unit (attached to GHQ Signal Regiment)

*Royal Army Ordnance Corps (RAOC):*

6 Central Ordnance Depot (COD)  
 21 Air Maintenance Platoon  
 22 Air Maintenance Platoon  
 30 Bn  
 28 Commonwealth Independent Infantry Brigade Group, Ordnance Field Park  
 99 Ordnance Field Park  
 103 Army Photographic Intelligence Service  
 221 Vehicle Bn  
 221 BVD<sup>957</sup>  
 443 Base Ammunition Depot  
 Printing Division, C Company, 30 Bn  
 Gurkha Records Office, GHQ 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon, FARELF

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<sup>957</sup> The term is not explained in the source or elsewhere.

*Service corps:*

## Royal Army Service Corps (RASC):

General Headquarters, 2<sup>nd</sup> Echelon  
 No. 1 Supply Depot (Batu Caves, KL)  
 No. 2 Supply Depot (Taiping)  
 3 Company (Coy)  
 3 Coy, General Transport (GT)  
 6 Coy (incl. LAD REME)  
 17<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Division (RASC)  
 30 Coy Gurkha (RASC)  
 30 Gurkha Transport Regiment (GTR) Workshops, REME  
 37 Coy (water transport)  
 24 Coy  
 27 Coy  
 27<sup>th</sup> Independent Infantry Coy (RASC)  
 29 Coy  
 55 Coy, Air Dispatch (AD)  
 61 Coy (Locally Enlisted Personnel (LEP))  
 74 Coy  
 436 Transport Coy  
 986 Coy, Water Transport  
 126 Transport Platoon, Royal Australian Army Service Corps

## Royal Corps of Transport (RCT):

3 Squadron, RCT 28<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Brigade

*Medical units:*

## Royal Army Medical Corps:

8 Field Dressing Station (formerly 16 Field Ambulance) (incl. 21<sup>st</sup> Field Surgical Team)  
 16 Commonwealth Field Ambulance  
 19 Field Ambulance  
 39 Field Ambulance (incl. 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade Group Medical Coy)  
 Staff, British Military Hospital Kinrara (incl. 34 Coy as well as no. 1 & 2 Mass Miniature Radiography)  
 Staff, British Military Hospital Kamunting  
 Staff, British Military Hospital, Terendak  
 Staff, British Military Hospital Kluang  
  
 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Ambulance, Federated Malaya States Volunteer Force  
  
 Queen Alexandria's Royal Army Nursing Corps  
 Royal Army Dental Corps  
 Royal Army Veterinary Corps

*Army Air Corps (AAC):*

7 Flight AAC  
 11 Flight AAC (656 Army Air Corps Squadron (Sqn))  
 14 Liaison Flight (656 Light Aircraft Sqn)  
 1914 Air Observation Post (AOP) Flight  
 656 AOP Sqn  
 Air Support Signals Unit (ASSU)

*Other:*

17 Gurkha Divison Provost Coy

Corps of Royal Military Police  
Malaya Regiment Military Police  
Gurkha Military Police

Intelligence Corps  
Field Security Wing Malaya Intelligence Corps

Royal Army Pay Corps  
Army Catering Corps  
Royal Army Chaplains Department  
Royal Army Educational Corps

Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC)

## Appendix D

### Main units from of the French Union engaged in the Indochina War<sup>958</sup>

Introductory notes: Due to the fact that none of the many books on the Indochina War consulted features a comprehensive (French) order of battle the list below is not complete. In particular, service units are under-represented for want of sources. The same goes for units of the Cambodian *Armée royale khmère* set up in 1950/1.

It should also be noted that specific infantry units were often formed ad-hoc from various elements of parent units or simply dissolved. Others were attached to newly formed groups. At the same time, names and compositions of many divisions, brigades, regiments, battalions and companies changed over time.

From 1951 on many of the regionally raised units were incorporated into the three national armies of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The newly established regiments and battalions, too, were given different names over time.

#### *First CEFEO units (1945-6)*<sup>959</sup>:

Groupe mobile/2<sup>e</sup> Demi-brigade (Groupement Massu)  
9<sup>e</sup> Division d'infanterie coloniale (DIC) (elements)  
Eléments organiques de corps d'armée

#### *Large CEFEO units:*

9<sup>e</sup> DIC  
3<sup>e</sup> DIC  
1<sup>er</sup>-4<sup>e</sup> Division de marche du Tonkin  
1<sup>ère</sup> Brigade d'Extrême-Orient

#### *Metropolitan infantry:*

- 1<sup>er</sup> and 3<sup>e</sup> Bataillon d'infanterie légère d'Afrique (BILA); Bataillon de marche (BM)/35<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'Infanterie (RI), BM/43<sup>e</sup> RI, BM/49<sup>e</sup> RI, BM/110<sup>e</sup> RI and BM/151<sup>e</sup> RI
- 3<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de marche d'Extrême-Orient

#### *Colonial infantry:*

- BM/1<sup>er</sup> Régiment d'infanterie coloniale (RIC), 1<sup>er</sup> BM/2<sup>e</sup> RIC; 5<sup>e</sup> RIC, BM/5<sup>e</sup> RIC; 6<sup>e</sup> RIC; 1<sup>er</sup> and 2<sup>e</sup> BM/11<sup>e</sup> RIC; 21<sup>e</sup> RIC, BM/21<sup>e</sup> RIC; 23<sup>e</sup> RIC, BM/23<sup>e</sup> RIC; 43<sup>e</sup> RIC, BM/43<sup>e</sup> RIC; 110<sup>e</sup> RIC; I&II/Régiment de Corée

#### *Foreign Legion infantry:*

- 2<sup>e</sup> Régiment étranger d'infanterie (REI), 3<sup>e</sup> REI, 5<sup>e</sup> REI, 13<sup>e</sup> Demi-Brigade (13<sup>e</sup> DBLE)

<sup>958</sup> Plus allied forces, such as sects and irregular troops.

<sup>959</sup> Many of these troops were repatriated in 1946 after the arrival of further reinforcements.



*Airborne troops:*

- Metropolitan: 1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon parachutiste de choc (1<sup>er</sup> BPC) (1947-8); I/1<sup>er</sup> Régiment des chasseurs parachutistes (1947-9); II/1<sup>er</sup> RCP (1953-4); III/1<sup>er</sup> RCP (1947-8); 2<sup>e</sup> RCP; 10<sup>e</sup> Bataillon parachutiste de chasseurs à pied (10<sup>e</sup> BPCP) (1950-2)
- Colonial: Demi-brigade parachutiste SAS (re-named 2<sup>e</sup> Demi-brigade coloniale de commandos parachutistes (DBCCP).<sup>960</sup> (1948)
- Foreign Legion: 1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon étranger de parachutistes (BEP), 2<sup>e</sup> BEP (1949-54)
- 3<sup>e</sup>, 5<sup>e</sup> and 6<sup>e</sup> Antenne chirurgicale parachutiste (ACP)

*Plus:*

1<sup>er</sup> Régiment parachutiste d'infanterie de marine  
 17<sup>e</sup> Compagnie parachutiste du génie  
 60<sup>e</sup>, 75<sup>e</sup> and 342<sup>e</sup> Compagnie de transmission parachutiste (CTP)  
 1<sup>er</sup> Régiment de hussards parachutistes (after 1948 attached to the II/1<sup>er</sup> RCP)  
 35<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'artillerie lourde parachutiste (RALP)  
 1<sup>ère</sup> Compagnie étrangère de mortier lourde parachutiste (CEMLP)  
 Etat-major groupement léger aéroporté (EM GLAP)  
 États-majors opérationnels des bases aéroportées (EMO BAP)  
 Poste de commandement base aéroporté nord (PC BAPN)  
 Troupes aéroportées Indochine du nord (PC TAPN)  
 Groupement de commandos parachutistes (GCP)  
 Base aéroporté sud (BAPS)  
 Groupement aéroporté (GAP) 2  
 Groupement aérien tactique (GATAC)  
 Détachement de liaison et d'observation (DLO)  
 Various units of Défense contre aéronefs (DCA)  
 Escadrille des liaisons aériennes (ELA)  
 Service/section technique des unités parachutistes

*Marine commandos:*

Commandos Fonde, Dronne, Ponchardier, Jaubert, Montfort, Ouragan, Tempête, Sénée and Bergerol plus units of fusiliers-marins

*Other commandos:*

Commandos du Nord, Sud et Centre Vietnam  
 Commandos 610-33-31

*(North) African units:*

- Algerian & Tunisian Rifles: 1<sup>er</sup>, 2<sup>e</sup> and 3<sup>e</sup> BM/1<sup>er</sup> Régiment de tirailleurs algériens; 1<sup>er</sup>, 2<sup>e</sup>, 3<sup>e</sup> BM/2<sup>e</sup> RTA; 1<sup>er</sup>, 2<sup>e</sup> and 3<sup>e</sup> BM/3<sup>e</sup> RTA; BM/6<sup>e</sup> RTA; BM, 4<sup>e</sup>, 5<sup>e</sup> BM/7<sup>e</sup> RTA; 21<sup>e</sup>, 23<sup>e</sup>, 25<sup>e</sup> and 27<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de tirailleurs algériens (BTA); 1<sup>er</sup>, 2<sup>e</sup> and 3<sup>e</sup> BM/4<sup>e</sup>/Régiment des tirailleurs tunisiens (RTT)
- Moroccan Rifles: 1<sup>er</sup>, 2<sup>e</sup> and 3<sup>e</sup> BM/1<sup>er</sup> Régiment de tirailleurs marocains; 1<sup>er</sup>, 3<sup>e</sup> and 4<sup>e</sup> BM/2<sup>e</sup> RTM; BM, I, II/3<sup>e</sup> RTM; 1<sup>er</sup>, 2<sup>e</sup> and 3<sup>e</sup> BM/4<sup>e</sup> RTM; I, II, III, IV/& BM/5<sup>e</sup> RTM; II, III & BM/6<sup>e</sup> RTM; BM/7<sup>e</sup> RTM; BM/8<sup>e</sup> RTM; 10<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de marche marocain (BMM)

<sup>960</sup>

Successor battalions were termed: 1<sup>er</sup>, 2<sup>e</sup>, 3<sup>e</sup>, 5<sup>e</sup>, 6<sup>e</sup>, 7<sup>e</sup> & 8<sup>e</sup> (BCCP). From March 1951 they were re-named Bataillons de parachutistes coloniaux (BCP).

- Moroccan Goumiers<sup>961</sup>: Local auxiliaries were at times attached for reconnaissance tasks; Main units: 1<sup>er</sup>, 2<sup>e</sup>, 3<sup>e</sup>, 5<sup>e</sup>, 8<sup>e</sup>, 9<sup>e</sup>, 10<sup>e</sup>, 11<sup>e</sup> and 17<sup>e</sup> Tabors.<sup>962</sup>
- Senegalese/African Rifles<sup>963</sup>: 24<sup>e</sup> Régiment de marche de tirailleurs sénégalais (2 battalions); 13<sup>e</sup> & 26<sup>e</sup>-32<sup>e</sup> BMTS incl. 1<sup>er</sup> & 3<sup>e</sup> BM d'Afrique occidentale française and 2<sup>e</sup> BM d'Afrique centrale française

*Armée nationale de Vietnam (ANV):*

*Tieu Doan* (battalions) 62, 63, 64, 65, 68, 75 and 76 (formerly attached to Foreign Legion and Coloniale regiments); 1<sup>er</sup>, 3<sup>e</sup>, 5<sup>e</sup> and 7<sup>e</sup> Bataillons parachutistes vietnamiennes nationales (BPVN). In theory, 145 battalion-sized formations were in service or under training by 1954 but the real figure was lower. Of the total, 45 were light battalions, so called *Tieu Doan Kinh Quan* (TDKQ).

At the end of 1951 the ANV comprised:

1<sup>ère</sup> Division (Sud Vietnam):<sup>964</sup>

1<sup>er</sup> Bon<sup>965</sup> vietnamien (composed of former éléments of the Garde nationale du Vietnam Sud (GVNS), supplétifs and sects)  
 3<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from GVNS)  
 5<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from GVNS and supplétifs)  
 11<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from GVNS, 1<sup>er</sup> and 3<sup>e</sup> Bataillon (probably GVNS) as well as supplétifs)  
 13<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from BM du 151<sup>e</sup> RI)  
 15<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from supplétifs Cao Dai)  
 17<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from Catholic supplétifs)  
 19<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from 1/43<sup>e</sup> RIC)  
 21<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from 1<sup>er</sup>, 3<sup>e</sup>, 5<sup>e</sup>, 11<sup>e</sup> Bataillon (GVNS) and supplétifs)  
 1<sup>er</sup> Escadron de reconnaissance (vietnamien) (from GVNS)

2<sup>e</sup> Division (Centre Vietnam):

7<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (composed of former éléments of the Garde nationale du Vietnam centre (GVNC))  
 8<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from GVNC)  
 12<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (GVNC)  
 23<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (GVNC)  
 25<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (GVNC)

3<sup>e</sup> Division (Nord Vietnam):

2<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (composed of former éléments of Garde nationale du Vietnam nord (GVNN))  
 4<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from GVNN)  
 6<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from GVNN)  
 9<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from GVNN)  
 10<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from GVNN and new recruits)  
 14<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from 7<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de marche d'Extrême-Orient (BMEO))  
 16<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from Catholic supplétifs)  
 18<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from Catholic supplétifs)  
 20<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from trained units and supplétifs)  
 22<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from 1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon 'Méduse')

<sup>961</sup> Irregulars from North Africa.

<sup>962</sup> Tabors (battalions) consisted of three Goums each (companies) plus HQ.

<sup>963</sup> West & central African volunteers and conscripts normally commanded by French officers and NCOs.

<sup>964</sup> Status at the end of 1951 for all four divisions listed here.

<sup>965</sup> The term isn't explained in the source but most likely stands for battalion.

26<sup>e</sup> Bon vietnamien (from 2<sup>e</sup> Bataillon 'Méduse')

4<sup>e</sup> Division (Plateaux montagnards du sud):

1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon montagnard (composed of elements of the former Groupe de commandos montagnards des plateaux (GMCGM))<sup>966</sup>

2<sup>e</sup> Bataillon montagnard (from GMCGM/Brigade mobile de la garde montagnarde)

3<sup>e</sup> Bataillon montagnard (from 3<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de marche d'Extrême-Orient (BMEO))

4<sup>e</sup> Bataillon montagnard (from 4<sup>e</sup> BMEO)

5<sup>e</sup> Bataillon montagnard (from 3<sup>e</sup> BMEO)

6<sup>e</sup> Bataillon montagnard (from 3<sup>e</sup> BMEO)

7<sup>e</sup> Bataillon montagnard (from Dalat garrison and supplétifs)

Etat-major des forces armées vietnamiennes (EM/FAVN)

Further units mentioned in the sources:

5<sup>ème</sup>-7<sup>e</sup> Division d'infanterie vietnamienne containing:

24<sup>e</sup>, 27<sup>e</sup>, 29<sup>e</sup>, 30<sup>e</sup>, 31<sup>e</sup>, 53<sup>e</sup>, 55<sup>e</sup>, 56<sup>e</sup>, 58<sup>e</sup>, 59<sup>e</sup>, 83<sup>e</sup>, 252<sup>e</sup> (later becoming Tieu Doan 42) and 302<sup>e</sup> (later 32<sup>e</sup> before constituting the Groupement Nung) and 503<sup>e</sup> Bataillon d'infanterie vietnamien

255<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de la garde (becoming Tieu Doan 45)

2<sup>e</sup>, 4<sup>e</sup>, 6<sup>e</sup>, 7<sup>e</sup>, 8<sup>e</sup>, 10<sup>e</sup> and 11<sup>e</sup> Escadron de reconnaissance vietnamien

3<sup>e</sup> and 5<sup>e</sup> Escadron blindé de reconnaissance vietnamien (the 5<sup>e</sup> later becoming the 2<sup>e</sup> Escadron du 3<sup>e</sup> Régiment de reconnaissance)

1<sup>ère</sup> Groupe d'escadrons d'escorte vietnamien

3<sup>e</sup> Régiment de reconnaissance vietnamien

2<sup>e</sup> Groupe d'artillerie vietnamienne (later incorporated into Groupe mobile 21)

4<sup>e</sup> Groupe d'artillerie vietnamienne (later incorporated into Groupe mobile 41, then 42)

5<sup>e</sup> Groupe d'artillerie vietnamienne (later incorporated into Groupe mobile 31)

7<sup>e</sup> Compagnie de transmission

3<sup>e</sup>, 4<sup>e</sup>, 6<sup>e</sup> and 7<sup>e</sup> <sup>967</sup> Compagnie de transport

Compagnie de quartier général régionale 1 and 2

La Garde de Sa Majesté l'Empereur Bao Dai

Garde républicaine cochinoise

Garde du Vietnam Sud (GVNS) (until 1951)

Garde des provinces méridionales du Centre Vietnam (with elements of the former Garde indochinoise du Sud Annam)

Garde frontalière de l'Ouest tonkinois (later Bataillon de garde Thaï)

1<sup>er</sup> Groupe autonome d'escadrons d'honneur (part of the Garde républicaine de Cochinchine)

1<sup>ère</sup> Groupe d'escadron d'escorte vietnamienne (becoming the 1<sup>er</sup> Régiment de dragons vietnamiens)

3<sup>e</sup> Régiment de reconnaissance vietnamien (becoming the 3<sup>e</sup> Régiment de dragons viet.)

44<sup>e</sup> Détachement chirurgicale mobile de l'ANV<sup>968</sup>

1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon de marche indochinois (BMI)<sup>969</sup>

Service de santé de l'Armée nationale de Vietnam

<sup>966</sup> The letters probably stand for Groupe mobile des commandos de la garde montagnarde.

<sup>967</sup> Latter forming part of Groupe de transport 7.

<sup>968</sup> My translation from the English term.

<sup>969</sup> This was an early unit of the CEFEO which was later incorporated into the ANV.

*Armée royale de Laos:*

2<sup>e</sup> 970, 3<sup>e</sup> 971, 5<sup>e</sup>, 6<sup>e</sup> 972, 7<sup>e</sup> and 8<sup>e</sup> Bataillons de chasseurs laotiens<sup>973</sup>  
 2<sup>e</sup> Commando de chasseurs laotiens  
 4<sup>e</sup>, 5<sup>e</sup> and 6<sup>e</sup> Commandos laotiens<sup>974</sup> (12 commandos by the end of the war)  
 1<sup>er</sup>-6<sup>e</sup> Bataillon d'infanterie lao (BIL) (from 1950 on)<sup>975</sup>  
 1<sup>er</sup> and 5<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de parachutistes laotiens (BPL)  
 Garde nationale (later to become the Gendarmerie laotienne with 3 Compagnies de gendarmerie) featuring 25 commandos de garde nationale and 62 Comp. de garde nat.  
 Groupements mixtes d'intervention (GMI) (300 men in total)  
 Bataillons légers (laotiens) (7 in total)  
 Mortar companies (3 in total)  
 Artillery batteries incl. Batterie autonome d'artillerie laotienne (BAAL)  
 Compagnies d'escorte (laotiens) (6 in total)  
 1<sup>er</sup> and 2<sup>e</sup> Escadron de reconnaissance (laotien)  
 Groupe d'artillerie (laotienne)  
 Compagnies de génie (laotiens) (7 in total)  
 Compagnies de transport (laotiens) (3)  
 Compagnie de train (laotien) (2)  
 Compagnie de transmission (laotienne)  
 Compagnie de matériel (laotien)  
 Compagnies de l'intendance  
 Antenne chirurgicale mobile 23 and 24  
 Bataillon léger laotien  
 Service de santé de l'Armée royale du Laos  
 Staff at the Hôpital Commandant Guenon  
 Supplétifs (19 in total)<sup>976</sup>, para-military forces<sup>977</sup>, partisans<sup>978</sup> and interpreters  
 Comité permanent de défense franco-laotien (from 1951 on)  
 Staff of the Ecoles d'instructions (Dong Hene, Chi Nai Mo) and Centre de formation technique and Ecole de sous-officiers (both at Pakse)

*Armée royale khmère:*<sup>979</sup>

Etat-major de l'Armée royale khmère (EM/ARK)  
 Régiment mixte du Cambodge (RMC)  
 1<sup>er</sup>, 4<sup>e</sup> and 7<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de chasseurs cambodgiens (BCC)  
 Bataillon de parachutistes khmers (BPK)  
 Commando blindé du Cambodge<sup>980</sup> (turning into the 8<sup>e</sup> Escadron du 5<sup>e</sup> Régiment de cuirassiers)  
 3<sup>e</sup> Escadron monté du Cambodge (transferred to the ARK in 1950)  
 Service de santé de l'Armée Royale Khmère

*Regular units composed of minorities:*

1<sup>er</sup>, 2<sup>e</sup> and 3<sup>e</sup> Bataillon Thaï<sup>981</sup>  
 Commando Thaï

<sup>970</sup> Becoming the 12<sup>e</sup> Bataillon d'infanterie laotienne.

<sup>971</sup> Dissolved in 1950 and integrated into the 1<sup>er</sup> and 2<sup>e</sup> BIL.

<sup>972</sup> Integrated into the GCMA.

<sup>973</sup> Became the 7<sup>e</sup>, 8<sup>e</sup>, 9<sup>e</sup>, 10<sup>e</sup> and 12<sup>e</sup> BIL in 1954.

<sup>974</sup> The last one became the 6<sup>e</sup> Commando franco-laotien in 1947.

<sup>975</sup> 12 such battalions existed by the end of the war.

<sup>976</sup> Eventually labelled Compagnies légères de supplétifs militaires.

<sup>977</sup> Later integrated into the Garde nationale.

<sup>978</sup> The latter mainly served as self-defending militia and village guards.

<sup>979</sup> It proved extremely difficult to locate any Cambodian units in the few existing lists. The ones mentioned above should therefore be seen only as a few examples of a larger force.

<sup>980</sup> Strictly speaking not a unit of the ARK as the latter wasn't in existence yet when the unit operated.

<sup>981</sup> Originally from the Compagnies autonomes Thaï des provinces de Son La, Nghia Lo and Lai Chan.

1<sup>er</sup> and 2<sup>e</sup> (Bataillon) Muong<sup>982</sup>  
 Groupement Nung  
 Parachute units composed of Muong, Nung and Tho

*Auxiliaries, sects and partisans:*

- The French formed irregular commandos for counter-guerrilla operations throughout the war. But from 1951 Groupements de commandos mixtes aéroportés (GCMA)<sup>983</sup> waged war on the Viet Minh in the highlands of the Tonkin. These troops, for the most part recruited among minorities, eventually totalled up to 20,000 men and were led by French officers and NCOs.
- Sect militia: Hoa Hao, Cao Dai and Bin Xuyen (plus French liaison missions and advisors)
- Unités mobiles pour la défense des chrétientés (UMDC)
- Supplétifs (manning watchtowers for instance), including Compagnies légères de supplétifs militaires (CLSM)

*Armoured units:*<sup>984</sup>

1<sup>er</sup> Régiment de chasseurs à cheval  
 4<sup>e</sup> Régiment de dragons portés  
 5<sup>e</sup> Régiment de cuirassiers 'Royal Pologne'  
 Régiment d'infanterie coloniale de Maroc<sup>985</sup>  
 1<sup>er</sup> Régiment étranger de cavalerie<sup>986</sup>  
 2<sup>e</sup>, 5<sup>e</sup> and 6<sup>e</sup> Régiment des spahis marocains and 8<sup>e</sup> Régiment des spahis algériens<sup>987</sup>  
 6<sup>e</sup> Groupe des spahis marocains portés (formed at the end of the war, probably with elements of above)  
 Régiment blindé colonial d'Extrême-Orient (Set up in 1950 with tanks and tank destroyers to counter a possible Chinese attack in the north.)  
 Commando blindé du Cambodge (after 1946 8<sup>e</sup> Escadron du 5<sup>e</sup> Régiment de cuirassiers)  
 9<sup>e</sup> Régiment de dragons (later Groupement d'unités d'armes lourdes de la brigade d'Extrême-Orient)  
 Escadron autonome de reconnaissance  
 Bataillon porté du groupement blindé Haut-Tonkin (dissolved and attached to the RICM after 1947)  
 Groupe d'escadron de marche de l'armée blindée (dissolved in 1947)  
 Escadron lourd de réparations (after 1951 attached to the RICM)  
 4<sup>e</sup> Régiment de dragons portés  
 5<sup>e</sup> Régiment de cuirassiers  
 Groupement blindé du Tonkin (GBT)

<sup>982</sup> Towards the end of the war some of these units were incorporated into the ANV.

<sup>983</sup> Later Groupe mixte d'intervention (GMI).

<sup>984</sup> These often comprised sizeable Vietnamese motorised infantry units. Upon his arrival de Lattre set up first Sous-groupements blindés (SGB) (1 tank squadron with tanks, half tracks and lorried infantry companies). The equally formed Groupes d'escadrons de reconnaissance (GER) counted 1 reconnaissance squadron of armoured cars, howitzers and local infantry.

<sup>985</sup> Despite its name an armoured unit, supported by tanks and infantry. By 1952/3 it comprised 2 tank and 3 reconnaissance squadrons, plus 5 infantry companies. It formed GB3 and GER2 operating in Annam and the Tonkin.  
<sup>986</sup> Served initially in an infantry role, later with armoured cars, trucks, jeeps and tanks. It introduced 'crabe' and LVT (Landing Vehicles Tracked) 'Alligator' in amphibious operations. In 1953 it comprised 18 squadrons located in Tourane and Haiphong.

<sup>987</sup> These changed in equipment and use starting as infantry units in 1949, later employing tank and halftrack squadrons forming GB4 and operating in Annam. The 8<sup>e</sup> RSA began as an infantry unit and later grew into GB1 operating in the Tonkin.

*Groupes mobiles:*

Self-reliant motorised brigades set-up from 1950-1 on. They usually comprised three lorried infantry battalions with some towed artillery, light armour and/or tanks, engineer, signals and medical elements numbering 3,000-3,5000 men. Throughout the war 17 of these groups were formed from French, Foreign Legion, African, Vietnamese and montagnards troops. They were primarily used for threatened sectors in the Tonkin. Among them was the Groupement Vanuxem (GM8, S/GB 2).

*Amphibious units:*

- Set up for operations in swamps and canals, i.e. the Plaine des Joncs, the Tonkin Delta and the Annamese coast. By 1954 two Groupements amphibies existed, staffed with elements from the 1<sup>er</sup> REC. The consisted of 3 squadrons of US-type weasels ('Crabes'), 3 of LVT and 6 of the latter with howitzer turrets.
- The Dinassauts (Divisions navales d'assaut) 1, 3, 5 and 12 (operating in the Tonkin), 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 (operating in Annam and Cochinchina) also had their own commandos and Compagnies légères d'accompagnement (CLA).

*Engineers:*

2<sup>e</sup> Régiment étranger du génie  
 17<sup>e</sup> Régiment du génie  
 19<sup>e</sup> Régiment du génie  
 31<sup>e</sup> Régiment du génie  
 61<sup>e</sup> Régiment du génie  
 73<sup>e</sup> Régiment du génie

*Artillery:*

1<sup>er</sup> Régiment d'artillerie coloniale du Maroc (RACM)  
 3<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'artillerie coloniale (RAC)  
 41<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'artillerie coloniale  
 69<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'artillerie  
 69<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'artillerie d'Afrique (RAA)  
 Groupe d'artillerie coloniale (GAC) de l'Afrique occidentale française (AOF)  
 3<sup>e</sup> Groupe du 10<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'artillerie coloniale (RAC)  
 2<sup>e</sup> et 4<sup>e</sup> Groupe du 4<sup>e</sup> RAC  
 4<sup>e</sup> Groupe du 4<sup>e</sup> RAC

*Mortar:*

1<sup>ère</sup> and 2<sup>e</sup> Compagnie mixte de mortier de la légion étrangère<sup>988</sup> (CMMLE)

*Signallers:*

71<sup>e</sup> and 72<sup>e</sup> (Compagnie) coloniale de transmission (CCT)  
 822<sup>e</sup> and 823<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de transmission

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<sup>988</sup>

My translation from English.

*Transport:*

503<sup>e</sup>, 513<sup>e</sup>, 515<sup>e</sup>, 516<sup>e</sup>, 518<sup>e</sup> and 519<sup>e</sup> Groupe de transport  
 555<sup>e</sup> Compagnie muletière  
 71<sup>e</sup> Compagnie de circulation routière (CCR)  
 Train du Laos  
 Train du Cambodge  
 Train de troupes françaises d'Indochine du Sud  
 Train de troupes française d'Indochine du Nord  
 Train de troupes française d'Indochine du Centre Annam

*Supply and repair:*

5<sup>e</sup> Compagnie moyen de réparation de la légion étrangère<sup>989</sup>  
 730<sup>e</sup> Compagnie d'alimentation en essence, dépôt no. 8<sup>990</sup>  
 3<sup>e</sup> Compagnie d'alimentation en munition<sup>991</sup>

*Medical (and social) units:*

Direction du service de santé du corps expéditionnaire  
 Direction des services sanitaires en Extrême-Orient  
 Service de santé (militaire) de l'avant  
 Service de santé de corps de troupe  
 Service d'aide médicale urgente (SAMU)  
 Hôpitaux mobiles de campagne  
 Hôpital d'évacuation motorisé (HEM) 415  
 Antennes chirurgicales de l'avant (ACA) (such as ACA 403), mobiles (ACM 20-40) and  
 parachutables (ACP 1-10)  
 Equipes chirurgicales mobiles (ECM)  
 Postes de secours  
 Sections de triage  
 Compagnies de triage-traitement  
 Compagnies de ramassages  
 Dépôt de réserve sanitaire (DRS) 451  
 Dépôts d'approvisionnement sanitaire (DAS)  
 Ambulances parachutistes  
 29<sup>e</sup> Détachement chirurgicale mobile  
 Corps des infirmières militaires  
 Convoyeuses de l'air (Groupement des moyens militaires de transports aériens  
 (GMMTA))  
 Ecole de médecine militaire vietnamienne

*HQs and political:*

Missions militaires auprès des états-associés  
 Mission française d'assistance auprès les états associés  
 Etat-major opérationnel (EMO) Sud  
 Groupement opérationnel du nord-ouest (GONO)  
 Etat-major particulier (EMP)  
 Etat-major interarmées des forces terrestres (EMIFT)  
 1<sup>ère</sup> Groupe de commissaires d'exploitation opérationnel<sup>992</sup>  
 Garde républicaine  
 Gendarmerie

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<sup>989</sup> My translation from the English.

<sup>990</sup> Ditto.

<sup>991</sup> Ditto.

<sup>992</sup> Ditto.

*Intelligence:*

Direction générale des études et recherches (DGER)  
 Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure (DGSE)  
 Service de documentation extérieure et de contre-espionnage<sup>993</sup> (SDECE)  
 Sécurité militaire  
 Services spéciaux  
 Service de renseignement (SR)  
 Service de renseignement opérationnel (SRO)

*Administrative and social services:*

Corps/cadres administratifs des forces armées d'Extrême-Orient (CAFAEO)<sup>994</sup>  
 Auxiliaires féminins de l'armée de terre (AFAT)  
 Personnel féminin de l'armée de terre (PFAT)<sup>995</sup>  
 Centre d'instruction fixe (CIF)  
 Corps de liaison administrative d'Extrême-Orient (CLAEO)  
 Service de presse  
 Etablissement cinématographique et photographique des armées (ECPA)  
 403<sup>e</sup> Détachement postale<sup>996</sup>  
 Aumôniers (chaplains)

Involved in considerable number but not listed anywhere systematically are units from the following branches :

Mortier (mortar)  
 Renseignement (intelligence)  
 Train (Transport)  
 Matériel  
 Intendance (supply)  
 Essence (gas/petrol)  
 (Service) Vétérinaire

Sources: Bodin, *La France et ses soldats*, 15, *Les combattants français face à la guerre d'Indochine*, 263-4, 'Les laotiens dans la guerre d'Indochine, 1945-1954' in *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 2008/2 - n° 230, pp. 5-21 (made available on CAIRN) and 'Le corps expéditionnaire français à la veille de la bataille de Dien Bien Phu' in *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains*, 2003/3, n° 211, pp. 11-27 (CAIRN), J. Dalloz, *Dictionnaire de la guerre d'Indochine*, 101, 140-1 and 228, H.-J. Lousteau, *Les derniers combats d'Indochine* (1984), p. 264 and Annexe 1, Fall, *Hell in a Very Small Place*, Appendix A, Lemaire, *Le service de santé militaire dans la guerre d'Indochine*, 66-71, 75-89, 222-32, 315-8 and 335-8, Lieutenant-Colonel C. Franc, 'L'armée nationale vietnamienne et le recours aux formations supplétives',<sup>997</sup> *Cahier de la recherche doctrinale*, Centre de doctrines et d'emploi des forces (CDEF), Division recherche et retour d'expérience (DREX) (2009), Thabaut, *Médecin Lieutenant au 1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon Muong*, 143-4 and 148-50, De Galard, *Une femme à Dien Bien Phu*, 29, SHD/DITEEX 1KT 1218, M. Windrow & M. Chappell, *The French Indochina War*, 11-7, P. Héduy, *La guerre d'Indochine, 1945-1954* (1981), pp. 221, 330-50, [www.cdef.terre.defense.gouv.fr/publications/cahiers\\_drex/cahier\\_retex/retex12.pdf](http://www.cdef.terre.defense.gouv.fr/publications/cahiers_drex/cahier_retex/retex12.pdf) and [www.68raa.com](http://www.68raa.com), [www.witzgilles.com/regiments\\_et\\_bataillons\\_indochine.htm](http://www.witzgilles.com/regiments_et_bataillons_indochine.htm)<sup>998</sup> and [www.anac-fr.com](http://www.anac-fr.com).

993

Ditto.

994

Mostly contractors.

995

Members of these female services supported mainly but not exclusively the SSM.

996

My translation from the English term.

997

This is not an academic article but a study by the French military in view of the build-up of Afghan forces.

998

This site was set up by a researching ex-serviceman named Jean-Claude Dubuisson, who is particularly interested in the Foreign Legion. After some correspondence the author sent me a list of roughly 60 books he had used as references. I double-checked some units and, having found them to be correct, decided to use his list to fill in service and Vietnamese units in particular. Mr. Dubuisson further brought several useful books and articles to my attention.



## Appendix E

### Commanders-in-chief of the land forces in Malaya, 1948-57

Introductory notes: This list focuses on the military commanders. But it should be born in mind that until April 1950 operations were coordinated by the commissioner of the police, Colonel Gray, with the army and RAF assuming supporting roles. In strategic and political terms responsibility rested with the high-commissioner.

This set-up changed somewhat with the arrival of Lieutenant-General Briggs. Technically, he was equal in rank to the chief secretary and held full co-ordinating powers over the police, the navy, army and air force. However, commanders of these branches could appeal to their superiors in London in case they strongly disagreed with orders.

Further, it should be noted that both politically and militarily, Singapore represented a separate realm although the authorities assisted in the counter-insurgency efforts. This was done principally through patrols in the waters separating the island from the mainland. The city-port also served as headquarters for the navy and (initially) the air force. The latter was eventually moved to Kuala Lumpur to be closer to the Malayan HQ.

Finally, internal security was handed over to the Malayan government in 1956 although much of the British military machine remained in the territory, including the last commander-in-chief.

1948: Major-General Sir Douglas Ashton (Lofft) Wade (general officer commanding)

1948-50: Major-General Sir Charles Boucher (general officer commanding)

1950-1: Lieutenant-General Sir Harold Briggs (director of operations in civilian role)

1952-4: General Sir Gerald Templer (director of operations & high-commissioner) assisted by

1952-3: General Sir Rob Lockhart (deputy director of operations)

1953-(probably 1954): Major-General W. P. Oliver (principal staff officer)

and

1952-3: Major-General Sir Robert Urquhart (general officer in command)

1953-4: Major-General Sir Hugh Stockwell (general officer in command)

1954-6: Lieutenant-General Sir Geoffrey (Kemp) Bourne (director of operations/GOC Malaya)

1956-7: Lieutenant-General Sir Roger Bower (director of operations)

## Appendix F

### French commanders-in-chief (*commandants supérieurs/commandants-en-chef*)

September 1945-March 1946:	General Philippe Leclerc (de Hautecloque)
June 1946-February 1948:	General Jean Valluy
February 1948-April 1948:	General Raoul Salan
May 1948-September 1949:	General Roger Blaizot
September 1949-December 1950:	General Marcel Carpentier
December 1950-January 1952:	General Jean de Lattre (de Tassigny) <sup>999</sup>
January 1952-May 1953:	General Raoul Salan
May 1953-June 1954:	General Henri Navarre
June 1954-June 1955:	General Paul Ely <sup>1000</sup>
June 1955-February 1956:	General Pierre Jacquot

Commanders-in-chief of French troops in northern Indochina (*Troupes françaises de l'Indochine du nord* (TFIN))<sup>1001</sup>:

May 1947-February 1948:	General Raoul Salan
August 1948-September 1949:	General Chanson <sup>1002</sup>
September 1949-November 1950:	General Marcel Alessandri
February 1951-May 1953:	General François (Gonzalez de) Linarès
June 1953-October 1954:	General René Cogny

Commanders-in-chief of French troops in Southern Indochina (*Troupes françaises de l'Indochine du sud* (TFIS))<sup>1003</sup>:

December 1946-February 1948:	General Georges Nyo
February 1948-September 1949:	General Pierre Boyer de la Tour (du Moulin)
September 1949-July 1951:	General Chanson
September 1951-June 1953:	General Paul Bondis
June 1953-October 1954:	General Roger Gardet

<sup>999</sup> In conjunction with the job of high-commissioner.

<sup>1000</sup> In conjunction with the job of high-commissioner.

<sup>1001</sup> Later *Troupes françaises du Nord Vietnam* (TFNV).

<sup>1002</sup> None of the sources list his first name.

<sup>1003</sup> Later *Troupes françaises du Sud Vietnam* (TFSV).

Additional commanders were specifically in charge of the *Armée de l'air* (air force) and the *Marine* (navy) operating in Indochina, as well as of the *Forces terrestres de l'Extrême-Orient* (FTEO)<sup>1004</sup>, the *Forces terrestres du Centre Vietnam (et des plateaux)* (FTCV(P))<sup>1005</sup>, the *Forces terrestres du Laos* (FTL)<sup>1006</sup> and the *Forces terrestres du Cambodge* (FTC).<sup>1007</sup> The last two were for much of the war instructed and directed by the *Missions militaires françaises auprès du gouvernement royale laotien/cambodgien*.<sup>1008</sup> Vietnamese land forces were incorporated into the *Armée nationale du Vietnam* (ANV) under the command of General Nguyen Van Hinh from 1952 on.

Sources: Bodin, *Dictionnaire de la guerre d'Indochine*, 123-4 and *Les combattants français face à la guerre d'Indochine*, 263, Lt.-Col. Franc, 'L'armée nationale vietnamienne et le recours aux formations supplétives' in *Cahier de la recherche doctrinale* (CDEF/DREX), 40.

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<sup>1004</sup> Far Eastern Land Forces.

<sup>1005</sup> Originally *Forces terrestres du Centre Annam* (TFCA).

<sup>1006</sup> Later incorporated into the *Armée nationale du Laos* (ANL).

<sup>1007</sup> Later incorporated into the *Armée royale Khmère* (ARK).

<sup>1008</sup> French military missions to the Laotian and Cambodian governments.

## Appendix G

### Ranks and unit levels in the British Army

Note: Units could strongly vary in strength. Most have been under strength throughout history, except during the world wars. The numbers quoted here are therefore approximate. Further, the definitions below apply mainly to the infantry.

Rank	Commanding/task
Field-Marshal	Title given to certain generals (Montgomery, Slim and Templer for instance) for great distinction in their service. It was eventually abolished by the government.
General	Army (several in WWII)
Lieutenant-general	Corps
Major-General	Division
Brigadier	Brigade
Colonel	Staff appointment and honorary title
Lieutenant-colonel	Battalion
Major	Company
Captain	“ (second-in-command)
Lieutenant	Platoon
2 <sup>nd</sup> lieutenant	“ (second-in-command and stand-in)
Warrant officer class 1 (WOI)	Senior NCO in a regiment and colonel's link to his men. Responsible for day-to-day business and discipline. They have often been regimental sergeant majors or artificer sergeant majors.
Warrant officer class 2 (WOII)	Similar responsibilities but lower ranked. They have usually been senior sergeants.
Staff/colour sergeant	Responsible for drill and arms
Sergeant	Platoon (second-in-command)
Corporal	Section
Lance-corporal	(Lance means 'in-waiting')
Private	Soldier

Unit level	Consisting of	Strength
British Army	Divisions and/or regiments	Approx. 100,000 in peace time, approx. 500,000 in war
Corps <sup>1009</sup>	Several divisions (flexible)	Up to 50,000
Division	3-4 brigades	Up to 20,000
Brigade <sup>1010</sup>	3-4 battalions	Up to 5,000
Regiment	1-4 battalions <sup>1011</sup>	400-1,500
Battalion <sup>1012</sup>	Usually 3-4 (rifle) companies plus support and HQ companies. <sup>1013</sup>	4-800
Company <sup>1014</sup>	3 and more platoons	1-200
Platoon	2-3 sections	24-50
Section	Individual servicemen	Up to 15

Sources: Interviews, questionnaires, memoirs and regimental journals cited in appendix A plus [www.army.mod.uk/structure](http://www.army.mod.uk/structure). Military training, service, promotions, ranks and numbers were further discussed in an interview on 6.5.2007 with a long-serving colonel. He also checked above lists and provided me with a booklet he published in 1998. He wished to remain anonymous.

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<sup>1009</sup> Have rarely been set up.

<sup>1010</sup> Could be part of a division or exist by themselves.

<sup>1011</sup> During the world wars more battalions were raised within a regiment.

<sup>1012</sup> Commando for the Royal Marines.

<sup>1013</sup> In Malaya the support company usually featured signalling and mortar platoons. Generally, it could also comprise pioneer, reconnaissance, anti-tank and machine gun platoons. The HQ company has traditionally included quartermasters, sergeant-majors, adjutants, administrators and caterers, as well as intelligence and medical officers. Further, a battalion has traditionally featured officers' and NCO's messes (incl. staff), a regimental band and orderlies, which/who were also present in Malayan army camps. Due to shortages even such camp staff was sent on patrols.

<sup>1014</sup> In the artillery the equivalent has been a battery or troop. For parachute, SAS and tank units as well as for Royal Engineers, Royal Corps of Signals, Royal Logistic and Transport Corps it has been squadrons.

## Appendix H

### Ranks and unit levels in the French Army

Introductory notes: The French Army has been structured in more complicated ways than its British counterpart. Varying terms for similar roles and units have been used in different arms. To simplify things, the lists below represents mainly ranks, definitions, roles, strengths and structures in the infantry. It should be pointed out that the details entailed are largely based on handbooks from the 1930s and 1940s. The military of 1945 and after experienced changes and saw new branches come into existence, such airborne units. Figures quoted usually refer to the peacetime army. This owes to the fact that France operated in a peacetime mode between 1945 and 1954 and that most units were constantly under strength in Indochina.

Rank	British equivalent	Commanding/responsibility
<i>Maréchal (de France)</i> <sup>1015</sup>	Field-Marshal	Military as a whole
<i>Général d'armée</i> <sup>1016</sup>	General	Army
<i>Général de corps d'armée</i> <sup>1017</sup>	Lieutenant-general	Corps
<i>Général de division</i>	Major-general	Division
<i>Général de brigade</i>	Brigadier	Brigade
<i>Colonel</i>	Ditto	Regiment (assisted by 2 lieutenant-colonels)
<i>Lieutenant-colonel</i>	Ditto	Regiment
<i>Commandant</i> <sup>1018</sup>	Major	Battalion (assisted by <i>adjudant</i> )
<i>Capitaine</i>	Ditto	Company <sup>1019</sup>
<i>Lieutenant</i>	Ditto	<i>Section</i> <sup>1020</sup> (platoon) (assisted by <i>sous-lieutenant</i> and NCOs)
<i>Sous-lieutenant</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup> lieutenant	<i>Section</i>
<i>Aspirant</i> <sup>1021</sup>		
<i>Major</i>	Sergeant-major	Most senior NCO <sup>1022</sup>
<i>Adjudant-chef (de compagnie, bataillon or régiment)</i>	Warrant officer I/regimental sergeant-major <sup>1023</sup>	Company, battalion or regiment
<i>Adjudant (de compagnie, bataillon or régiment)</i>	Warrant officer II/sergeant-major <sup>1024</sup>	Company, battalion or regiment
<i>Sergent-chef</i> <sup>1025</sup>	Quarter-master sergeant	Company, battalion or regiment

<sup>1015</sup> As in Britain, this has usually been an honorary title for very distinguished generals. It was awarded posthumously to Leclerc and de Lattre.

<sup>1016</sup> This has usually been a *général de division* charged with directing an army.

<sup>1017</sup> This has usually been a *général de division* charged with directing a corps.

<sup>1018</sup> Alternatively called *chef de bataillon* or *chef d'escadron* in the cavalry and artillery.

<sup>1019</sup> Squadron in the cavalry or battery in the artillery.

<sup>1020</sup> The French translation of a platoon is '*peleton*' but the term has been reserved for cavalry/armoured units.

<sup>1021</sup> Not yet commissioned officer in training (after being an officer cadet) or volunteering (particularly in war).

<sup>1022</sup> Mostly responsible for administrative tasks in a company, battalion or regiment.

<sup>1023</sup> British sources differ in regard to the exact responsibility of and British equivalent for this rank.

<sup>1024</sup> Ditto.

<sup>1025</sup> *Maréchal de logis chef* in the cavalry and transport units.

<i>Sergent</i> <sup>1026</sup>	Sergeant	<i>Section</i> (assists lieutenant)
<i>Caporal-chef</i>	Lance-Sergeant	<i>Groupe de combat</i> (section)
<i>Caporal</i> <sup>1027</sup>	Corporal	“ “
<i>Soldat de première classe</i> <sup>1028</sup>		
<i>Soldat</i> <sup>1029</sup> <i>de deuxième classe</i>	Private	

Unit	Consisting of	Number of troops (officers and other ranks)
<i>Armée</i> <sup>1030</sup>	Headquarters (HQ), varying number of corps and additional divisions kept in reserve, at least one cavalry division, troops and services <sup>1031</sup>	Between 80,000 and 400,000
<i>Corps</i> <sup>1032</sup>	HQ, 2-4 divisions and corps troops	Up to 80,000 (war strength)
<i>Division</i>	HQ, divisional artillery HQ, divisional infantry HQ, 3 infantry regiments and one divisional artillery regiment	Ca. 18,000 (war strength) <sup>1033</sup>
<i>Brigade</i>	HQ, <i>demi-brigade of chasseurs</i> (HQ and three battalions) and infantry regiment	Ca. 3,000 (cavalry)
<i>Régiment</i>	HQ, HQ company, signal and close support weapon company ( <i>engines d'accompagnement</i> ) and three battalions	Ca. 1,600
<i>Bataillon</i>	HQ section, machine gun company and 3 rifle companies	Ca. 450
<i>Compagnie (de fusiliers voltigeurs)</i> <sup>1034</sup>	HQ and 3 <i>sections</i>	Ca. 120
<i>Section</i>	3 <i>groupes de combat</i>	30-40
<i>Groupe de combat</i>	One rifle and one L.A. <sup>1035</sup> <i>équipe</i>	Up to 10
<i>Equipe</i> (team)	<i>Fantassins</i> (soldiers)	3

Additional notes:

- Members of the metropolitan army, largely conscripts, were stationed in France (and after WWII in Germany) unless they volunteered for service overseas. The *Armée d'Afrique*, whose cadres were mostly metropolitan, and the *Coloniale* could be employed anywhere.

<sup>1026</sup> *Maréchal de logis* in the cavalry and transport units.

<sup>1027</sup> The caporal-chef and caporal have been a *brigadier* in the cavalry, artillery and transport units.

<sup>1028</sup> Not a rank per se but a distinction for experienced or outstanding soldiers.

<sup>1029</sup> Depending on the branch they have been referred to as *tirailleur*, *chasseur*, *legionnaire* (all infantry), *pionnier* (pioneering), *servan* (artillery), *cavalier* (cavalry), *sapeur* (engineering and signaling), *chasseur* (tanks) and *infirmier* (medical service).

<sup>1030</sup> Often organised into *groupes d'armée*, armies could vary in composition and strength.

<sup>1031</sup> Artillery, engineer, air, anti-aircraft, tank, signal, survey, *intendance*, medical, veterinary, remount, light railway, road transport corps (train) and labour units.

<sup>1032</sup> Have not existed in peace time.

<sup>1033</sup> 13,500 for a cavalry division.

<sup>1034</sup> 'Light infantrymen'.

<sup>1035</sup> The term isn't explained in the British source and could mean a number of things but probably stands for 'light arms'.

- Within these armies specific, regional units existed such as the *tirailleurs sénégalais* (a generic term for indigenous troops raised in West, East and Equatorial Africa), the *tirailleurs tunisiens*, *algériens*, *annamites* and *cambodgiens*, *zouaves* (composed of French residents in North Africa), *chasseurs d'Afrique* (French cavalry units stationed in North Africa), *spahis* (mixed cavalry units in North Africa), *goums*, *moghzens* (Moroccan irregulars with French cadres, temporary in the first and permanent in the second case) and *méharistes* (camel corps companies in the Levant). Some of these units were structured differently from their metropolitan counterparts. *Goums* for instance counted between 160 and 180 men and were commanded by officers of the *services des affaires indigènes*.<sup>1036</sup>
- Generally, the size and composition of armies in the overseas territories tended to be more limited and simpler than those in mainland France. They usually featured 2-3 infantry brigades (or regiments in Morocco) plus individual battalions, up to six cavalry regiments (except in sub-Saharan Africa and Indochina), up to three artillery regiments, up to two engineer battalions (or individual companies) and usually one light tank battalion (two companies in Indochina), plus auxiliary units. The Foreign Legion consisted of five infantry regiments (including a depot), a cavalry regiment (including a depot) and a disciplinary company.
- Within the metropolitan army two main types of units existed: field and fortress units.<sup>1037</sup> The latter differed in strength and composition from infantry units, albeit not dramatically.
- Headquarters on all levels down to a division usually consisted of four (later five) bureaux whose responsibilities were as follows:
  - 1<sup>er</sup> Bureau: personnel and material
  - 2<sup>e</sup> Bureau: intelligence
  - 3<sup>e</sup> Bureau: operations
  - 4<sup>e</sup> Bureau: transport and supply
  - 5<sup>e</sup> Bureau: propaganda<sup>1038</sup>
- Officers could also be employed in headquarters (usually after attending the staff college) and as liaison officers with foreign forces. Apart from short spells with their original units for the sake of promotions, they worked permanently at general staff.
- The smallest unit capable of functioning independently was normally the regiment. Exceptions were to be found in the light infantry (*chasseurs à pied* incl. *chasseurs alpins*) where the battalion assumed this role.
- In contrast to its British counterpart, almost all arms in the French Army were set up in the manner of services with their own budgets and directorates at the Ministry of Defence. Services were normally commanded by a director.

1036

Part of the *services spéciaux*.

1037

The entire frontier area from the North Sea to the Mediterranean was organised into fortified areas and sectors, directed by regional commanders and their staff.

1038

This section usually existed at the highest levels. It turned into *actions psychologiques* during the Algerian War.



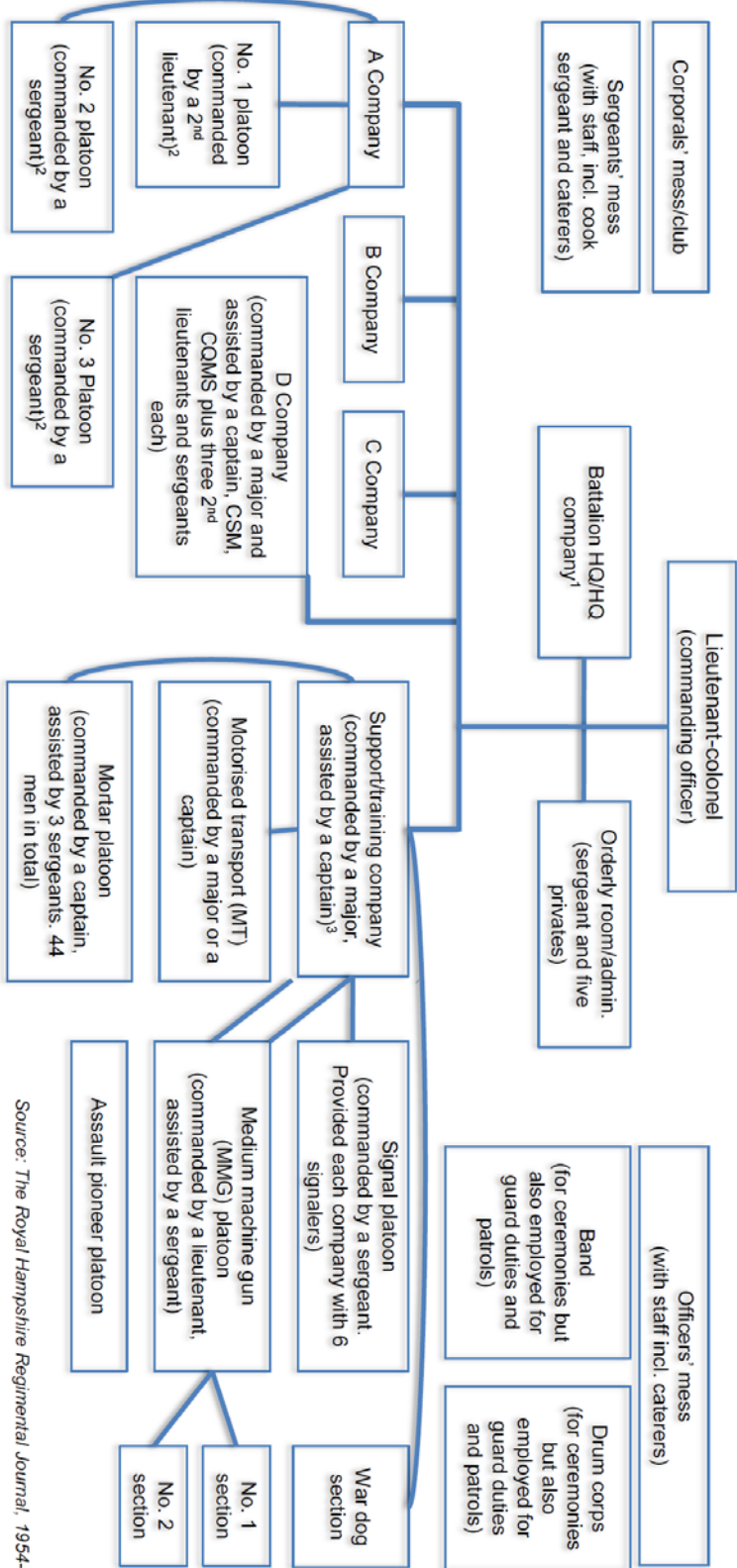
- In the colonies French units served alongside native and mixed units. In all three types the relatively high number of officers and NCOs were mostly French. Indigenous servicemen could in theory attain higher ranks but their numbers remained extremely small until decolonisation.
- The following arms did not exist in peace as independent units: reconnaissance, anti-aircraft machine gun, anti-tank, trench mortar and signal. In peace signallers for instance formed part of the corps of engineers.
- The *gendarmerie* assumed partly military roles but was/is a force apart from the army. It provided forces for Indochina, which were responsible for security and training. It was also represented in other colonies, where its members strengthened the native guards. The *gendarmerie* usually recruited ex-soldiers between 21 and 40 years of age, who signed up within 5 years of leaving the army. The body was responsible, apart from police duties, for recruiting and mobilisation, while also operating as a military police in the form of detachments within army units.
- The *gendarmerie* included the *Garde républicaine mobile*. Apart from maintaining order, the latter trained gendarmes. In war it was dissolved, with the other ranks assuming the roles of NCOs for the reserve. It was organised in legions and *peletons* and counted roughly 13,000 troops in the 1930s. It should not be confused with the *Garde républicaine (de Paris)*, whose tasks ranged from protecting official buildings to assisting the police in time of upheaval, both in Paris. In the 1930s it amounted to roughly 3,000 men.
- The *Service de l'intendance*, responsible for supplies, some ordnance stores, pay, etc. came closest to a British service. Like the finance, legal and medical wings its staff were both army personnel and civilians with distinctive ranks.
- Transport was a separate entity in the French Army and was undertaken by the road transport corps (*train*). Every regiment in turn had its own second line of transport – the *train régimentaire*.
- The medical service operated on four levels: regiment, division (with a divisional ambulance group), corps (with a casualty clearing station) and general headquarters (with a secondary casualty clearing station). Smaller contingents operated in battalions and field artillery regiments. The veterinary service was coupled with the cavalry and existed only in war.
- Anti-aircraft defence fell into the responsibility of the *Armée de l'air* (air force) in peace time. But in war those installations set up in army zones were under the command of the commander-in-chief.
- Coastal defence was the responsibility of the navy. Three coastal sectors existed in France, one in North Africa.

Sources: General Staff, War Office, *Handbook of the French Army* (1932), pp. 54-5 and 63-4, IWM, 03(44).0/4, 87/1216; General Staff, War Office, *Handbook of the French Army* (1940) (reprinted by the IWM in 2004), pp. 47-55, 61-99, 105-113, 129-41, 153-75 and 177-82; L. Sharp, *The French Army, 1939-40: Organisation, Order of Battle, Operational History. Vol. 1* (2001/2), v and Clayton, *The Wars of French Decolonization*, 4 and [www.defense.gouv.fr/terre/decouverte/personnels](http://www.defense.gouv.fr/terre/decouverte/personnels).

Appendix I

Sample unit: the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion the Royal Hampshire Regiment

Introductory notes: The composition and leadership of individual units constantly changed due to the continuous arrivals and departures of personnel. For approximate figures and compositions of units see appendix G. In this context, the platoons in A Company were fairly representative of the setup in the other three. Equally, the command structure in D Company was more or less the same for its sister units. The battalion as a whole employed 32 officers and 55 NCOs in Malaya during September 1955.



<sup>1</sup> Consisting of: Commanding officer (major), adjutant (captain), regimental sergeant master (RSM), orderly room quartermaster sergeant (ORQMS), orderly room sergeant, intelligence officer (captain), intelligence sergeant, padre, medical officer (captain), unit paymaster (major), officer commanding HQ Coy (major), 2 company sergeant masters (CSM), quartermaster (major), regimental & company quartermaster sergeant (RQMS and CQMS), physical recreation instructor (PRI, captain), PRI sergeant, signals officer (captain), signals sergeants, motor transport officer (captain), MT sergeant, bandmaster, band colour sergeant, drum major and education officer (WOII)).

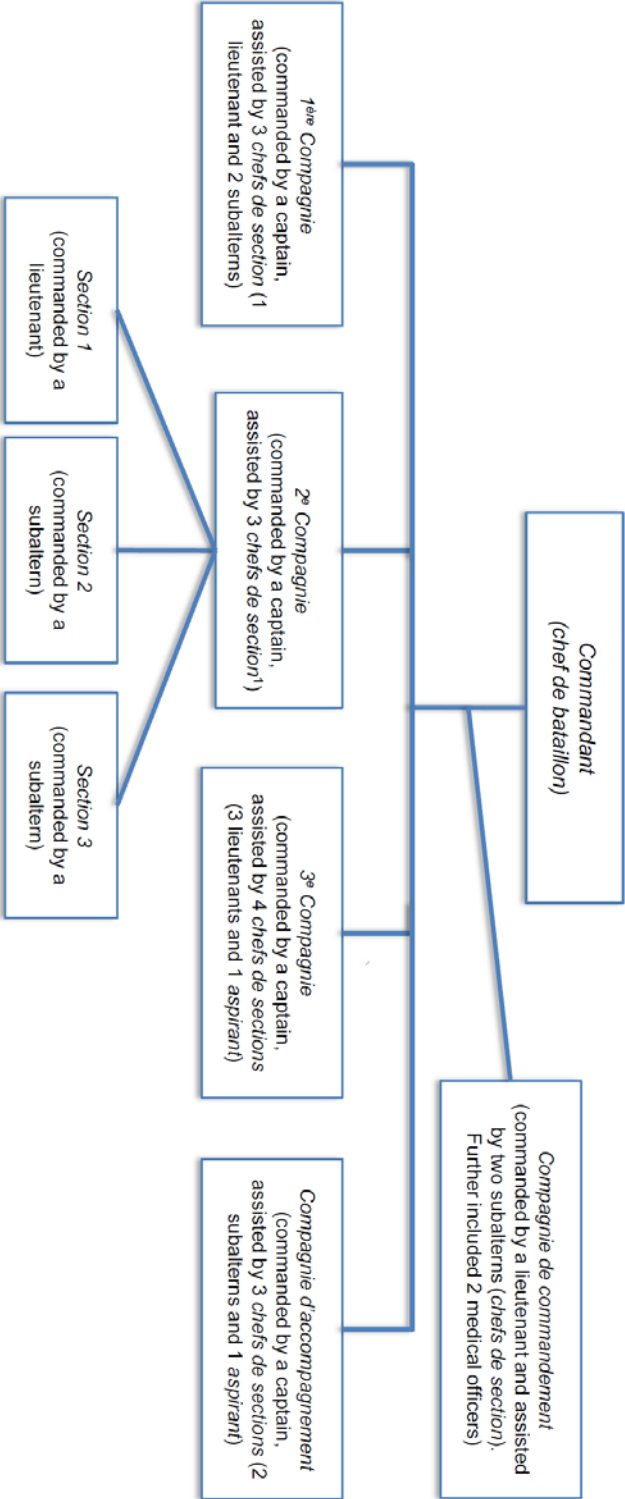
<sup>2</sup> Plus 5-6 corporals for each platoon.

<sup>3</sup> It is not entirely clear from the journal used whether all six sections emanating from support company on this chart were really attached to it or to the battalion as a whole.

Source: *The Royal Hampshire Regimental Journal, 1954-5.*

Appendix J  
Sample unit: Bataillon de marche du 151<sup>e</sup> Régiment d'infanterie

Introductory notes: This constitutes a simplified overview of the battalion. The source does not list service or locally recruited personnel (temporarily) associated or attached to the battalion. In regard to what does feature, the setup in 2<sup>nd</sup> company and its sections was more or less the same for its sister units. Around 1947 the battalion counted 24 officers and *aspirants*, 121 NCOs (excluding corporals), 309 *caporaux-chefs* and corporals, as well as 401 privates with the total amounting to 855 men. This was about twice as many as in peacetime and therefore, in terms of numbers, not necessarily representative of units operating later.



1 All in all, this company consisted of 1 captain, 1 lieutenant, 2 subalterns, 1 *adjudant-chef*, 6 *sergent-chefs*, 13 sergeants, 14 *caporaux-chefs*, 8 corporals and 55 privates. Of the total of 101 men, 49 died during their tour in Cochinchina, including the captain.

Source: Delpey, *Soldats de la boue*, appendices.

## Appendix K

### Sample questionnaire

Introductory notes: The questionnaire included a consent form and information regarding purpose of the study and copyrights. Forms not signed were not used. Participants were reminded that the questions referred to their thoughts and experiences during their tour (and not after) – as far as they could remember them. The forms were slightly adjusted over the course of the research as new issues came up. The one shown here represents a late example. Obviously, the original documents offered more space for answers.

Name: Address :  
 Phone: E-mail (if available):  
 Date questionnaire was filled out:  
 Date and location of birth: Father's (and mother's) profession:  
 Your social background: Schools/professional training:  
 Personal interests/hobbies before your tour in Malaya:  
 Newspapers and (radio) programmes you read/listened to before your service:  
 Date of entry into the army: Reason for joining: Trained as:  
 Original assignment/regiment (after basic training):  
 Nature of service in the army (please tick box): ☐ National Serviceman ☐ Regular ☐ Reserve/TA  
 Division/regiment/battalion (attached to) in Malaya:  
 Dates of tour in Malaya: Locations you were based in Malaya:  
 Primary roles and responsibilities:  
 Injuries/illnesses and/or other problems during your tour (or resulting from it):  
 Other postings and units (apart from Malaya and throughout your military career):  
 Length of service in the British Army/military in general:  
 Rank/status (upon leaving the army): Career after military service:

Were you taught about the British Empire when you grew up? If so, what?

Did you hear or read about it in the news?

Was the empire discussed in your family, among friends, in school or at work? If so, which aspects?

What did it mean to you personally? Were you in any way interested in it?

What about the Cold War? Did you read much about it? Was it a topic in the family, in school or at work?

Did you know anything about Malaya/Southeast Asia when you left Britain to serve in the emergency?

What were your first impressions of Malaya (and Singapore) when you arrived?

From what you saw, how did you judge the quality of the (civilian) infrastructure?

Were you briefed about the reasons for the fighting? Were you given any official information by the colonial/military administration? If so, what were you told and what kind of material did you receive?

In your own view at the time, what were the security forces fighting for and against what kind of enemy?

What did you think about the insurgents (Communist Terrorists), their methods, goals and motivation?

Did you feel that the security forces had sufficient/suitable equipment and manpower?

If not, did you consider this to be normal or did you think it may have reflected the (economic and political) strains on Britain and the empire?

How did you judge Britain's role and standing in the world?

Did you hear at the time of the Indochina War raging north of Malaya? If so, what did you think about it?

Did you encounter any French soldiers (including Foreign Legion and colonial troops) on your journey to Malaya?

If you had any, what did you do during leave and rest?

Did you get to see much of Malaya and its people? If so, what?

Did you have much contact with the population (any ethnicity, age or gender)? If yes, under what circumstances?

What were your impressions of the different ethnic groups (Malays, Chinese, Indian, Europeans, aborigines, etc.)?

Did you witness any serious relationships between (Commonwealth) soldiers and local women of any race?

How did you regard relations between soldiers and civilians in general?

What impression did the colonial administration, police, planters, managers and their families make on you?

How did you judge health, education, accommodation and working conditions of the non-European population?

Were your family and friends informed about events in Malaya? If so, how and when?

Did you like Malaya as a whole? Which aspects did you appreciate and which ones not?

Have you returned to Malaya after the end of your tour? If so, how often?

What has been your attitude towards Malaya's independence, your role in the conflict and the end of the British Empire? Has it changed over the years?

Are there aspects about the emergency and your role in it which you would rather not discuss with outsiders? (Obviously, you can simply hint at such topics.)

Is there anything you would like to add? Are there aspects one should be particularly aware of?

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